

GAY LEFT

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LESBIANS SPLAID +

A CURE FOR PSYCHIATRY +

THE STATE, REPRESSION AND SEXUALITY +

FIGHTING FASCISM + LOOKING AT PORNOGRAPHY +



How I posed as a lesbian wanting a baby

WITH NO EXAMINATION
OR EVEN QUESTIONS
ABOUT MY BACKGROUND
WAS OFFERED.

BY JOANNA

We wanted
to keep it
a secret
until these
children
grew up

January 5.

EXCLUSIVE: The Belgravia man
who helps lesbians have babies
**DOCTOR
STRANGE
LOVE**



In The Balance

by the Gay Left Collective

Effective political intervention demands clear political analysis. To know where and how to intervene we must understand as best we can the circumstances in which we struggle. At certain points *any* struggle to keep the flame burning is better than none at all. But in any political movement, and especially in the gay movement where our resources are limited and our unity tenuous, it is all too easy to dissipate energies in unco-ordinated activities. This collective article will attempt to draw up a balance sheet of the present situation of gay people in this country. We shall try first to describe how the situation of gay people has changed in recent years and then look at the overall direction of the gay movement.

I

Oppression in Liberation

Despite the real advances of the gay movement since the late 1960s, most lesbians and gay men still experience difficulty in being homosexual in this society. Although the gay world is now bigger and more accessible than ever before, the problems confronting homosexuals in the rest of their lives remain. Lesbians and gay men still face social ostracism, harassment on the streets and the possibility of losing their jobs. There is still a discriminatory legal situation in England and Wales, and an even more oppressive one in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Individuals are still harassed by police, press and neighbours. And even when we manage to avoid the excesses of law and prejudice, there is still the difficulty of establishing an identity in a gay world riven by distrust and anxiety.

At the same time there are now better social facilities than ever before. There are organisations which are able to help lesbians and gay men in trouble with the law. There are various gay self-help groups like FRIEND and Icebreakers, gay switchboards and local gay groups. We now have a flourishing gay press and more media publicity than in the past. Even the negative factors, like the trial of *Gay News* for blasphemous libel, or the press vilification of lesbian mothers, do also have the effect of publicising the subject and giving isolated individuals the possibility of realising that they are not the only homosexuals in the world.

These changes are rooted in two factors. First, the liberalising sexual climate of the 1960s gradually led to moderate but important legal changes (e.g. on divorce, abortion, male homosexuality) out of which a space was created for a greater public openness about sexuality in the 1970s. Secondly, the activities of the women's and gay movements from the late 1960s expressed and encouraged a new sense of sexual identity and autonomy.

Despite the importance of these developments, all sorts of tensions have arisen, because these changes have taken place within a limited framework. It is easier to be gay than before, especially if you are white, male, metropolitan, middle-class and over 21, although even here there is continuing harassment and stereotyping. But there has been an increase in public hostility towards those whose lifestyles pose any threat to the traditional values of the family. Lesbian mothers and paedophiles have recently been attacked and pilloried in the press. What is happening is not so much a 'liberation', a transcendence of heterosexual or family norms, as an increased sense of identity within society as it is—something early GLF believed was impossible. We are allowed to do a lot of what we want, as long as it does not go across certain intangible, shifting but very real barriers. The increasing police pressure on traditional forms of male gay promiscuity, such as cottaging, tends to sharpen the divide between tolerated and deviant gay behaviour. As the space for gay people becomes more clearly defined, it correspondingly becomes narrower, more separate and moreover actually reinforces the category of 'heterosexuality' which oppresses us.

Crises

The ambivalence of these changes has led to a crisis in the gay movement. Now, if you are out at all, you are liable to be out in a reasonably comfortable ghetto, which tends to blind you to the need for political activity. Only when a major confrontation arises, such as the *Gay News* trial, are people willing to become activist on the basis of a single issue.

Attitudes to sexuality have a certain autonomy, but they are defined within a wider social context. Current attitudes are thus complexly related to the current national social crisis and in turn to the national and international economy.

The crisis of combined inflation and mass unemployment, for instance, has almost certainly limited the possibilities of women leading autonomous lives, for it seems probable that one of the consequences of the economic crisis has been a relatively larger increase in female unemployment. The cut backs in the welfare state have also had an indirect but important part in reinforcing the traditional female role, e.g. through the cut back of nursery provision and community health care. Lesbian mothers are one group who will feel the impact of this particularly sharply.

Periods of economic crisis tend to be periods when the emphasis on the family increases—both out of economic necessity and under moral pressure. There is a tendency not to see the crisis as a crisis of capitalism. Instead 'lazy workers', 'immigrants' and 'permissive moral values' are lumped together with 'queers', 'reds' and 'women's libbers' as the cause of all our ills. As conservative thought invariably displaces the economic crisis from the reality of class struggle to the moral sphere, so the family and its supposed traditional values assume a peculiar resonance. We can see this in the campaigns of Mary Whitehouse and the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association and the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child.

The crusades of the moral conservatives have had an undeniable influence on the terms of the public debate on sexuality. There has been an influence on the content of television programmes and the controller of BBC Radio 4 banned a programme on lesbians because it was too positive. In areas with conservative local councils there has been an increase in censorship, for example of films in London, against pornography in Manchester etc. In this city also there has been an atavistic attack on men dancing together ('licentious dancing'), thus reviving another ancient law as Whitehouse did with blasphemy.



Prospects for Change

All this has restricted the possibilities of further changes in attitudes to homosexuality at the level of the state. Since 1967 no real parliamentary attempt has been made to iron out the anomalies of the situations of gay men in England and Wales (e.g. in the army, navy and merchant navy). Efforts to harmonise the law in Scotland with that in England and Wales have failed. Northern Ireland still remains legally archaic. The Rev Ian Paisley has mounted a campaign called Save Us from Sodomy which wants any manifestation of homosexuality made illegal if the laws in Northern Ireland are ever brought into line with those in England and Wales. The Home Office Criminal Law Amendment Committee on the laws relating to sexuality will probably recommend some changes, but the likelihood of legal changes in the present political climate is minimal. It took ten years between the

issuing of the Wolfenden Report in 1957 and homosexual law reform. On another level the rising rate of convictions suggests that the police are more anxious to harass gays than ever—often just to boost conviction rates. There seems to be little Home Office direction of this harassment, but certainly no Home Office efforts to reduce it. Efforts of local 'liberal' police officers to liaise with the gay community are usually aimed at persuading gay men to collude in the policing of their own ghetto.

The media helps to foster this ambivalence. Press coverage of homosexuality is wider now than ever—thirty years ago the word could hardly be mentioned, now 'gay' is even used in headlines. But we still have to contend with all the salacious stories about the private lives of gay public figures. Some media personalities are more willing to come out than before, but the media still find it easier to accept a person as bisexual. Homosexuality is slowly being treated more positively in films and television, although most of the time we are portrayed as limp-wristed caricatures by a whole breed of camp comics. The assumption behind such images is that feminine traits in men are inherently laughable.

There is now a greater public presence of gay people. We have, because we have demanded it, some sort of identity, especially in the world of leisure and culture. There has not yet been a backlash. Gays are becoming more acceptable as long as they do not threaten traditional values or the future generation. But the word is: Thus far and no further. We have not yet lost anything substantial of the gains made over the past ten years. But it is still up to us; our future is very much in our hands.



Thames Television's *Rock Follies*

II

Disunity in Unity

The gay movement today is composed of small self-help groups, switchboards, political groups, action groups and some centres. The only unifying factor of all these bodies is a common gayness. A growing gay consciousness has enabled us to develop a general organised response to the political forces which are attempting to contain or push back the social and sexual reforms of the 1960s.

It has only been with the setting up of specific defence organisations around *Gay News* and the response to the *Evening News* attacks on lesbian mothers that we have witnessed a coherent level of activity within the gay movement. The problems of sustaining gay political activity are enormous and it is therefore much easier to organise defensive campaigns around specific attacks. The Gay Activists' Alliance, formed on the basis of the National *Gay News* Defence Committee and relying on grassroots self-activity, is an important new initiative which holds out the possibility of for united action.

The Relevance of Women's Struggles

In concentrating most of our energies in campaigns about law reform and in defence of *Gay News* there has been a tendency in the gay movement to forget the ideological advances made by the various campaigns of the women's movement. Campaigns such as the National Abortion Campaign bear a direct relation to our own struggles. The women's movement has made advances both theoretical and practical in the area of sexual politics, an area neglected by traditional left politics. In particular, it has posed the relation between the personal and the political and the value of autonomous groups, and has questioned the validity of traditional narrow revolutionary organisation. One of the major unifying features of all the campaigns of the women's movement is their attack on the immutability and 'naturalness' of both heterosexuality and the roles we learn in the nuclear family. Thus women have demonstrated the possibility of alternative lifestyles and different types of relationships to those of marriage-and-family. The demand for comprehensive nursery provision can challenge the idea that only biological parents should be involved in child care. Groups such as Women Against Racism and Fascism have demonstrated that the fight against fascists is not an activity solely for street-fighting straight men, for fascism is centrally about the family and women's place in it. Gay men have gained a great deal in the recent past from these struggles. There is a common aim in the struggles of gays and women in the claim we both make for control of our own bodies. This does not mean that our situations are identical. Gayness is 'invisible' in a way that femaleness is not. We have to develop a theory and practice that extends both into our own specific oppression and the structuring of human sexuality in general.

Gays at Work

Since the early days of GLF there has been concern expressed over the problems of being gay at work, and there have been many attempts to set up gay groups in unions. The aims of such groups are diverse—providing a social gathering for gays in the same occupation; supporting the process of coming out at work; educating the rest of the union membership. The bulk of such groups are in white collar unions—often in jobs such as teaching, child care, social work, which are points of strong ideological sensitivity. Some groups *have* been set up in manual unions but these have been exceptions.

Gay groups within unions have been invaluable in promoting discussion of gay politics and beginning a shift among other trade unionists. But many of those involved in gay work in the trade unions are isolated and often find themselves lost in a bureaucratic morass. They are often prevented by officialdom from contacting other gays. Gays and other oppressed groups are particularly vulnerable in the face of an economic policy that sees redundancies and cut-backs as a solution to the crisis. It is important both that trades unions recognise this vulnerability and that gays join the common fight against the cuts.

Gays in the Left

Some advances have been made on a different political level with the establishment of gay groups within the Communist Party, the International Marxist Group, and the Socialist Workers' Party. All these groups have made policy statements of various lengths and depths on the gay question. Like trade union work, these groups provide an important focus for the task of raising issues not only of sexuality but also of authority, emotions and the ideology of 'private life'. The development and strengthening of such theory and practice on the traditional left is of vital importance.

The real problem for us as gay socialists is that more and more people identify themselves as gay but do not relate to the gay struggle. And they certainly do not relate to the world of the labour movement and the left. Given the nature of the gay community to which they belong this is hardly surprising. The terms of reference of that community are set by fairly conservative or ostensibly apolitical forces such as, at best, *Gay News* or, at worst, owners of gay facilities who exploit the vulnerability of their clients. It seems to us that it is a function of the gay movement to address itself to this

wider gay community in order to make the relevance of gayness move beyond the sphere of leisure and culture to which it is often confined, to inform how we live all aspects of our lives.

Gay Times

The gay scene is attractive and fun, partly because it has the resources to make it so. But there could be more to gay life than that. The success of the recent Gay Times Festival in London makes it clear that many gay men welcomed the opportunity to talk to other gay men in an atmosphere where they were free to meet whether or not they wanted to pick each other up. Centres such as that in Birmingham provide a continuing social and political focus, and are of special importance when the only available facilities for homosexuality are cottages and pubs.

Once gay groups and centres have been established they begin to widen their horizons. The activities of Gay Sweatshop and of the Tom Robinson Band are examples. Just as with the dominant media, these have their own contradictions there is no way an oppressed group can suddenly start expressing itself shed of the scars of its oppression. Sweatshop's ambiguous use of camp, the male identification of rock music (even with right-on lyrics) these require further discussion. Yet these groups' public and unremitting commitment to gay liberation offer an alternative cultural framework. They suggest the possibility of relationships and life styles created on our own terms.

Attempts to work on our own terms meet with opposition from all kinds of 'conservatives'—gay and straight, left and right. In these circumstances it is necessary to link forces with other groups. The recently established Gay Activists Alliance may provide a campaigning national structure which will co-ordinate campaigns around issues as they arise. The affiliation of gay socialist groups, in for instance North London, Birmingham and Bradford, to anti-fascist groups provides a useful example of the way a gay group can strengthen its collective links with the rest of the left on a local level. But there is still the need for a national co-ordinated gay socialist presence.

This leaves many questions unanswered. As we said at the beginning, this has been an attempt to draw up a balance sheet. We have had to keep saying 'on the other hand', 'but', and using words like 'ambiguous', 'contradictory' and 'complex', because only such language accurately conveys the present position. We have to end with questions. What are the real sites of struggle, and are we fighting on them? What are the points of influence and change? We seem to have made some gains, but are we blind to what we have lost? Above all, where do we go now? What is gay liberation? What do we mean by 'gay'? What should we mean by 'liberation'?

The State, Repression and Sexuality

by Dennis Altman

This is an edited version of a paper prepared by Dennis Altman in 1976. Although written before the appearance of elements of what has been sometimes described as a 'backlash' it tackles many of the issues we must come to grips with if we are to understand recent events.

Taboos

Basically this paper addresses itself to the general question of how far sexual liberation necessarily implies far-reaching social change, how far, that is, contemporary capitalist societies depend upon a certain regulation of sexuality according to what Marcuse has called 'the performance principle'.¹ It concentrates on the deregulation of the taboo on homosexuality which is a central part of the overall prescription of 'normal' sexuality in western societies.

Why argue for the centrality of the taboo on homosexuality? One could, after all, argue that sexual repression in western society has much more basic factors, such as the emphasis on genital sexuality and the restriction of sexual expression to certain fixed times and places. But while this is theoretically persuasive I would argue that it is the *failure* to fully repress homosexuality that makes it so significant. Despite the existence of the most severe sanctions which identified homosexuality as a crime of unique horror (western sexual morality culminating in the Nazi internment of homosexuals in concentration camps along with Jews, gypsies and communists) homosexuals have never been fully suppressed in western history, and homosexuality is thus more of an apparent threat to the existing sexual order than the much more successfully repressed (and vague) areas of 'polymorphous perversity'.

In the last ten years there has been a dramatic change in the capitalist state's attitude to homosexuality. Because this has occurred simultaneously with new measures of repression in non-advanced capitalist societies (e.g. Cuba and some Arab states) it becomes possible to suggest the historically specific nature of the taboo on homosexuality.

Homosexuality and homosexuals

It becomes immediately necessary to distinguish between homosexuality and homosexuals, and in the latter case between males and females. The crucial point to insist on is that homosexual *behaviour* and homosexual *identity* are distinct phenomena, the second existing in a much more restricted number of societies than the first. Even in western societies it is probably a safe generalisation that the majority of homosexual behaviour is not engaged in by men, and even less by women, whose self-identification is homosexual; rather it is an experience of adolescence or of particular single-sexed institutions (e.g. prisons, schools, the army) and is not regarded by those involved as negating their heterosexual self-image. In many non-western societies temporary homosexual behaviour is legitimated and given official social recognition. Thus, writing of a visit to Morocco in 1952 Marc Oraison says:

"The students of the Islamic university—which I was able to visit—practised homosexual relations openly and publicly. This did not prevent them, having finished their studies, from marrying and settling down."²

Such students did not, quite clearly, define themselves as homosexuals. To so define oneself implies more than just sleeping with another woman or man, but rather the granting of a particular meaning to the gender of one's sexual partners, which in western societies takes on considerable importance. In the majority of human societies it appears that some form of homosexual behaviour is known.³ Homosexuals, that is, persons identified as such because of their sexual preference for members of their own sex, are far less common, and societies that condone homosexual behaviour in certain circumstances can be simultaneously very condemnatory of those who are identified as homosexuals.⁴

The existence of a considerable number of women and men whose self-definition is homosexual, and who regard homosexual relations as the primary ones in their lives, seems largely the product of modern western societies, and must be understood as possible only under the particular social formations of urbanisation and industrialisation. Traditional societies are organised in such a way as not to allow the possibility of a child choosing a way of life other than that

prescribed by tradition, thus exclusive homosexuals, where they exist, take on particular roles, often religious (as in the case of Amerindian 'berdaches') or become outcastes (which appears, literally, to be the case among northwest Indian Hindus). It is only with the breakdown of the ascriptive family and the very narrowly defined social roles of traditional cultures that it becomes possible to live as a homosexual in other than this very rigid way. Only in urban societies, where social institutions can develop independently of the family and clan, can a homosexual sub-culture develop.

Such relative freedom has always been much less available to women who have accordingly been far less likely to 'become' lesbians or to develop a female 'gay world'. Moreover, while in a male-dominated society homosexuality is a way for women to assert their independence against the dominant male ethos, it is for men rather a partial abdication of male privileges—sometimes compensated for by either a super-butch persona, or the mocking of women through 'drag'. Lesbianism and male homosexuality, therefore, have very different social meanings.

What biological evidence we have suggests that homosexual behaviour is as 'natural' a way for humans to respond to certain situations as is heterosexual. But if Gagnon and Simon are correct in arguing that 'the sexual area may be precisely that realm wherein the superordinate position of the sociocultural over the biological level is most complete',⁵ then for homosexuals to appear in a given society there need exist conditions in which one can both imagine homosexual activity and emotion, and then act them out. Where the latter possibility exists it is likely that a gay subculture will emerge. And it is precisely in the large cities of the west that one finds the most open and structured set of institutions catering for homosexuals.

In its early stages this subculture will probably be very closed and furtive. It will, moreover, tend to imitate the outside world, in particular to reproduce the assumption that heterosexuality is 'natural' by creating effeminate 'queens' and butch 'dykes'. This confusion between sex roles and sexuality tends to break down, so that the contemporary gay world of north America and northern Europe is far less likely to exhibit the stereotype features than was true twenty years ago⁶—or is still true in less affluent and liberal societies.

More than purely socio-economic factors are involved. Attitudes to sexuality, as to sex-roles, are the product of a complex of factors. Thus, while a recognisable homosexual subculture is the product of urban industrial society, variations between such societies are to be explained by other factors. For example, although there are a number of self-identified homosexuals in most Latin American countries, even such major centres as Mexico City or Buenos Aires have a very small and hidden homosexual subculture. This would seem due to a combination of Catholic values and the peculiar 'macho' traditions of Latin America, which seem responsible for some of the most vicious contemporary homophobia.⁷

In an odd way the best evidence for the assertion that a homosexual subculture is the product of modern urban and industrial society is found in certain non-industrial societies which have been exposed to the impact of western imperialism. In the large cities of the Third World one finds homosexual cultures that exist in a symbiotic relationship to the dominant imperialist culture; pre-Castro Havana, San Juan (Puerto Rico), Tangier, Bangkok all have their gay milieux, which provide a transition for locals between the traditional restraints of the national culture and the attractions of the western gay world. That prostitution is often the result is hardly surprising—the 1975 Spartacus 'Gay Guide' refers to boys at Kundu Beach, Bali, as 'available for a cigarette'—nor indeed does this differ from the normal heterosexual pattern of interaction between western and non-western societies. It does, however, help explain the hostility of many non-western revolutionaries towards homosexuality, just as the experience of prison homosexuality helps explain much opposition to homosexuals by black writers such as Eldridge Cleaver.⁸

The so-called socialist countries of eastern Europe are a special case. There the preconditions of urbanisation, industrialism and the breakdown of the extended family certainly exist, but the homosexual world is very limited.⁹ Which



Photograph by
Alan Bistry

The Photographers' Gallery
8 Great Newport Street London WC 2

suggests that the explicitly *political* dimension of liberalism is essential for a homosexual world to flourish. It is odd, but perhaps not surprising, that Marxist puritanism is more effectively enforced nowadays than that of judaeo-christianity.

Liberal advances

In the past ten years official prohibitions on homosexuality have been drastically reduced in liberal capitalist societies. I would argue that the change is in fact equivalent to the triumph of the demands of a consumer-oriented capitalism over one based on production and hence represents a more efficient and modern—but not necessarily less repressive—role for the state.

Obviously one of the key factors influencing changes in sexual mores is the invention of adequate birth control methods, which by breaking the link between sexuality and procreation for women has, by extension, destroyed the basis of the ideology that branded homosexuality as 'unnatural' by virtue of its non-reproductive nature. Sex is now technologically 'freed' to become a commodity.

This thesis would suggest that the homosexual movement can quite easily be contained within modern capitalist society, and that those who argue it is no real threat to that society are in fact accurate. Homophobia is undoubtedly a dominant attitude in most western societies,¹⁰ but changes in the role of the state have come about remarkably fast in the last twenty years. Just as the feminist struggle for abortion and adequate contraceptive services are likely to succeed in capitalist countries, so is that for homosexual rights, and for the same reason: the capitalist order no longer demands that sexuality be bent to the needs of the reproduction of labour power. Indeed the present requirements of capitalism are for privatised hedonism to maintain the extensive consumerism on which the system rests, and here homosexuals represent an attractive market rather than a social threat.

It is my guess that the stigma against homosexuals will gradually decline, though upholders of the old ethos, will still seek to enforce it. As part of the new permissiveness

homosexuals will no longer be branded criminals, and indeed their 'right' to serve in the civil service and armed forces, to marry and to adopt children will be recognised. That is, as it is no longer necessary to force everyone into the role of producing and raising children it will become possible for people to both reject that role by open homosexuality and to uphold it by parodying heterosexual marriage.

The Gay Movement

In discussing the changing role of the state in regulating homosexuality one need consider the role of the gay movement, at one and the same time a product and a cause of change. It could arise, of course, only under certain conditions, but to recognise this is not to deny its importance in helping produce both attitudinal and behavioural change.

The gay movement, as we know it, is essentially a product of the sixties, and with individual variations has gone through a three-stage development in North America, Western Europe and Australasia. The earliest groups—e.g. the Mattachine Society (USA), Arcadie (France), COC (Holland) were low-key and deferential in style, aiming at gradual amelioration of the quite savage persecution that was the norm almost everywhere in the west until ten years ago.

In the upsurge of radical energy of the late sixties, the second wave of the gay liberation movement emerged. Unlike their precursors, Gay Liberation demanded not tolerance but a radical change in society so as to attain full equality for homosexuals and recognition of homosexuality as part of the human potential.¹¹

We are now in a third wave, one that combines the overall social moderation of the first with the direct political activity of the second, and is much more disparate. It includes both church groups and radical collectives; it has increasing links with the commercial gay world which is for economic reasons ambivalent in its attitudes to homosexual liberation.

These moves are predicated on the assumption, which gay liberation rejected, that homosexuals can achieve equality within society as presently constituted. Homosexual activists, in fighting for their rights, are also fighting for the triumph of 'modern' values over traditional ones. But they are not in any fundamental way undermining the liberal capitalist state.

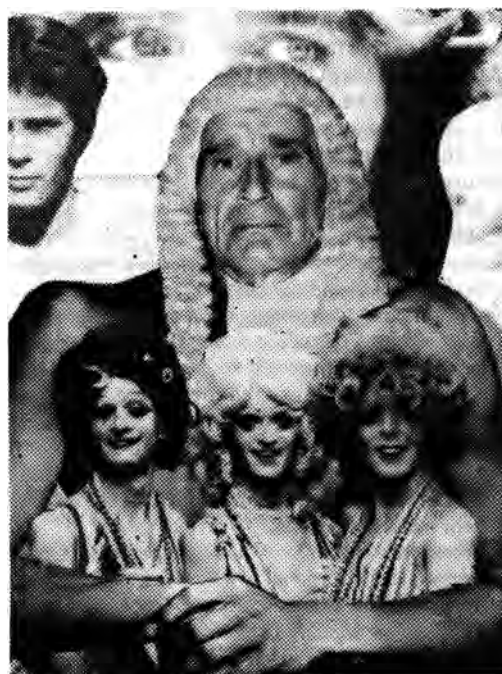
Limitations

Only a small minority of homosexuals in any way become involved in the gay movement. As the gay movement became much more visible and aggressive in the late sixties/early seventies there was considerable optimism about its ability to expand and draw in the majority of homosexuals. Even the great proliferation of organisations that went to make up the movement could be seen as a sign of strength. The mid seventies have seen some consolidation of the movement, in particular the emergence of a few more structured and permanent groups such as the American National Gay Task Force. By and large, however, the gay movement has not become a mass movement. In as far as one can disentangle the results of movement activity from more general social change, the gay movement has had some considerable successes. What it has not succeeded in doing is involving in its activities the majority of these people who identify themselves as homosexual.

Why this is so may throw light on something that we know very little about, namely under what conditions people come to perceive themselves as oppressed and to organise against this oppression. The contemporary gay movement began as part of a far wider socio-political movement. It was the expression of homosexuals who felt both sufficiently self-confident and sufficiently angry to make their sexuality a basis for political action. That only a minority of homosexuals then and in the foreseeable future share these feelings is a continuing problem for the gay movement.

It seemed self-evident to those homosexuals who became involved that they were oppressed. It is not, however, self-evident to most homosexuals, many of whom, indeed, resist this analysis very vigorously.

Two sorts of answer come to mind. The first is that homosexuals have been so badly oppressed, in particular have so internalised the pejorative judgement of society, that they



fail to perceive themselves as oppressed. The best example of this would be those homosexuals who seek 'treatment' to 'change' their sexual orientation. If one accepts homosexuality as a 'sickness' or a 'pathology' one is hardly likely to see legal or social restraints as oppressive.

But far more common are those homosexuals who accept their gay identity and yet reject the movement analysis that their situation is so oppressive that it should form the basis of a political movement. It is tempting to dismiss such persons as suffering from 'false consciousness', implying that we (namely the radicals) understand their situation better than they. To do this is to overlook one of the realities of social structuring, namely that only in extreme cases do oppressed groups not gain some benefits from their inferior position. This is something that is rarely discussed, but it does seem to play a role in explaining why groups do not always behave as radicals would want.

Kate Millet has written in *Sexual Politics*:

... something in me never wants to relinquish what took so many years hunting down ... I have borne this label so long it is a victory to embrace it, a way of life accepted..'

What Millett hints at, that the oppression experienced by homosexuals and hence the furtiveness of the gay world are an *essential* part of a gay identity, suggests that homosexuals do indeed have something to lose if gay liberation were to succeed. For the aims of gay liberation, as expressed in its heyday, imply a fundamental assault on that identity, and the possibility of, as I once put it, 'the end of the homosexual'. In modern western society, where being a Homosexual is a way of identifying oneself as a member of a particular and somewhat exotic sub-culture, this is not necessarily something to be desired. Like Jews, homosexuals may choose to cling to their separateness, even if this provokes persecution from the dominant majority.

In its present stage, however, the gay movement aims at far less than the radical restructuring of human sexuality that that would mean an end to the homosexual. Rather it seeks, as *Gay Left* (no. 2) put it, a situation in which the ghetto can come out, and to this extent it may well succeed in attracting a large number of homosexuals who will be able to have their cock and eat it too. The implication of most current activism is that homosexuals should define themselves as another minority group sharing the dominant cultural values of larger society while maintaining their right to a separate and equal existence. Homosexuals thus become the equivalent of an ethnic group. This undoubtedly is preferable to the present situation, but it hardly represents a radical threat. Much of the contemporary gay movement can be seen, indeed, as working for the better integration of homosexuals into the on-going society, even to the extent of propping up such institutions as marriage and the army.

Partial integration

What is apparent, nevertheless, is that only *a certain form* of homosexuality is accepted by society, and in so far as the gay movement works within this framework it will be both successful and no real threat whatsoever. Even in cities like New York or Sydney where homosexuality remains technically illegal, there are vast and overt opportunities for homosexual activity, and the growing numbers of those prepared to 'come out' publicly find that public sanctions against homosexuals are declining. (Though, one must note, at a very uneven rate.) The new 'permissiveness' has undoubtedly benefited homosexuals, though it is questionable how far this 'freedom' could be extended—whether, in particular, armies and police forces, not to mention car assembly lines, could tolerate open expression of homosexuality. Fairly clearly sex is 'free' only in times and circumstances that are intended for consumption, rather than production and regulation of the society. In the case of homosexuality, it is the burgeoning ghetto that offers such opportunities, just as heterosexuals find an increasing range of travel and entertainment industries to cater for their new freedom. But *within these limits* all forms of sexual expression are increasingly seen as equally valid.

This is the new, open 'pan-sexuality' of the 'liberated' seventies. It is expressed almost too well by Steve Ostrow, entrepreneur of New York's Continental Baths,

'In 14 years of marriage I'd never been with another woman. *Have* never, because I'm still happily married to my wife. Sex with another woman would have caused me deep remorse, but sex at a bath with boys, that was simple release. And I knew the country was full of men like me. Sex, after all, is the most intense form of communication, and this is a technological society built upon expanding communication, much as capitalism was built on expanding money; I sensed we'd need to expand a sexual communication by *promiscuity without guilt*, and that if I could create a place in which the middle class could create its own values, instead of living by values imposed upon it by the church, the state, as it always had ...'¹²

Note that homosexuality is *not* seen as a full and valid way of relating to others, *nor* as a real alternative to the heterosexual family. Its whole role is to provide safe release for genital urges. Guilt persists—not now about homosexual encounters, but about homosexual relations, as any observer of the current gay scene will notice. There is, clearly, a parallel with heterosexual 'swingers', who take pride in their 'non-involvements'.

The new freedom offers on one level considerable de-repression, while on another promoting the continued supremacy of the heterosexual norm which, it is now perceived, can tolerate far more 'deviance' than traditional moralists argued. Indeed this example suggests that the contemporary tolerance of homosexuals can in some cases extend to a tolerance of homosexuality among those otherwise seen as 'straight', and to this extent, as I shall argue, it *does* contain a radical potential.

Radical potential

Where the de-repression of homosexuality does seem to me to retain its radical potential is in terms of an argument about the inter-relationship between sexual repression and sex-roles. As David Fernbach has argued:

'The psychological production of masculinity and femininity involves the repression of homosexual tendencies, but this process works differentially for each sex. For the girl, it is not specifically lesbianism which is repressed, but rather any claim to sexual autonomy independent of the penis. For the boy, homosexuality seems equivalent to castration, involving the loss of his position as a sexual subject and becoming like women the object of male sexual aggression. The famous "male bond" serves to guard against this by harnessing male penises in the parallel, so to speak, towards the penetration of female sexual objects.'¹³

I want to conclude this paper with what is necessarily a very speculative argument about the link between male bonding, the repression of homosexuality and the perpetuation of certain sex-role characteristics among men. The concentration on males is not meant to suggest that there is not repression of female sexuality, but that, as Fernbach argues, its repression is of a quite different nature.

Such an analysis bases itself on one of Freud's central theses, namely that in individual development we all necessarily repress a large part of our sexual energy, which, nonetheless, persists in a transformed guise in everyone's behaviour. The *possibility* of homosexual object choice (as of heterosexual) is something we all experience, even if awareness of this is deeply repressed.¹⁴ Thus real de-repression of homosexuality need extend through the whole population, and will have an impact on social organisation far beyond the acceptance of the homosexual's right to do his or her 'thing'.

This argument sees the repression of homosexuality as essential in the formation of male bonding, itself the psychological basis for authoritarian and competitive relations in virtually all existing societies. Both contemporary feminists and ethnologists, despite their attacks on each other, accept the thesis that male bonding is a dominant reality in social organisation. This view is also apparent in Freud, except that Freud sees libidinal energy as underlying such bonding, a concept which the ethnologists tend to reject. How far the libidinal energy which unites all-male groups is specifically homosexual in nature is not clear in Freud's writings.

Yet while Freud rejects the idea of specifically homosexual urges as being sublimated into the maintenance of group ties, it is not really apparent why 'there is scarcely any sense in asking whether the libido which keeps groups together is of a homosexual or a heterosexual nature'¹⁵; the libido itself is (and can be) neither, but the idea that male bonding results from the sublimation of homo-erotic urges is to be found elsewhere in Freud. It is suggested in the famous myth of the brothers banding together to slay the primal father; the brothers' ability to coalesce 'may have been based on homosexual feelings and acts, originating perhaps during the period of their expulsion from the horde.'¹⁶ Most specifically it is found in Freud's comments written in 1911 on the 'Schreber case', where Freud wrote:

'After the stage of heterosexual object-choice has been reached, the homosexual tendencies are not, as might be supposed, done away with or brought to a stop; they are merely deflected from their sexual aim and applied to fresh uses. They now combine with portions of the ego-instincts and, as "attached" components, help to constitute the social instincts, thus contributing an erotic factor to friendship and comradeship, to "esprit de corps" and to the love of mankind in general. How large a contribution is in fact derived from erotic sources (with the sexual aim inhibited) could scarcely be guessed from the normal social relations of mankind. ...'¹⁶



If Freud is right then the *full* de-repression of homosexuality would seem to have very considerable consequences for social order. In a society which maintains heterosexuality as the norm (even were it to grant full rights to 'deviants'), the generalised de-repression of homosexuality would, according to speculation of this sort, begin a process of far more radical sexual release. Freed from guilt, the discovery by men of sexual feelings for each other could make it easier to break down hostility and aggression between each other—and, by extension, make it easier for them to relate as equals with women against whom aggression is also often directed—but to do so homosexuality would have to move beyond its current emphasis on genitality, often of an extremely aggressive sort, to an exploration of the tender dimensions of eroticism, the transformation, perhaps, of male bonding into a sisterhood of men.

The search for full sexual liberation, then, may need to move in a direction quite opposite to that of the gay movement which, having accepted the need to be integrated into the dominant heterosexual order, comes to support and indeed bolster its values. Often there is no alternative; in practice co-option is better than persecution. But it is not revolutionary, nor is it necessarily linked to any real change towards a less aggressive and more loving society. 'Make love, not war' is an appealing slogan, but it forgets that through history men have done both.

Notes

- 1 See H. Marcuse: *Eros and Civilisation*, N.Y. Vintage, 1961, ch. 2.
- 2 M. (raison): *La Question Homosexuelle* (Paris 75) p.96.
- 3 See C. Ford and F. Beach: *Patterns Of Sexual Behaviour* (London 1952), pp.132-42.
- 4 This seems to be the case in the modern arab world. See Karlen:

Sexuality and Homosexuality, ch.26, pp.463-83.

- 5 J.H. Gagnon and W. Simon: *Sexual Conduct: the Social Sources of Human Sexuality*, London, Hutchinson, 1973, p.15.
- 6 See L. Humphreys: 'New Styles in Homosexual Manliness', *Transaction*, March/April, 1971.
- 7 See G. Hannon: 'Oppression in Mexico', *Body Politic* (Toronto) N.13, May-June 1974 and the Latin American issue of *Gay Sunshine* (San Francisco) No.26/7, winter 1975-6 for an introduction to this area.
- 8 *Soul on Ice*, N.Y., McGraw Hill, 1968. Juliet Mitchell suggests a similar reason for Wilhelm Reich's homophobia. (See her *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.141.)
- 9 See, e.g. Sue Bruley: 'Ah, lesbianka!' *Gay Left* (London) No. 2, Spring, 1976, and Tom Reeves: 'Red and Gay', *Fag Rag* (Boston), No. 6, Fall-Winter, 1973. It is however reputed that there is a more overt gay world in both Warsaw and Budapest. There is also some interest in changing western attitudes among eastern European scientists.
- 10 For a discussion of this term see G. Weinberg: *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, N.Y., St. Martin's, 1971.
- 11 For a discussion of the emergence of a radical gay movement in the late sixties see my: *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, New York, Avon, 1972.
- 12 Tom Burke: 'King Queen', *Rolling Stone* (English edition), May 6, 1976, p.13.
- 13 D. Fernbach: 'Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation', *Gay Marxist* (London) No. 2, July 1973.
- 14 S. Freud: *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, London, Hogarth Press, 1962, p.11 (footnote).
- 15 *Totem and Taboo*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950, p.144.
- 16 S. Freud: 'Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia' in *Complete Works* (J. Strachey, ed.), London, Hogarth Press, 1958, p.61.
- 17 For some interesting comments on homosexuality as a form of aggression see T. Vanggaard: *Phallos*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1972, ch.8.

THE GAY ACTIVISTS' ALLIANCE

The prosecution of *Gay News* by Mary Whitehouse led to the setting up of a National Committee to organise activities in its defence. This culminated in the massive demonstration on February 11th 1978 of over 5000 people through London, the biggest gay march ever seen in this country.

In the present climate of attacks on lesbians and gay men, many people felt that the Gay News Defence Committee should continue in some form to respond to other events, based on the successful local action groups that had come together in several towns.

A conference was held in Birmingham on February 25th when it was decided that continued links were necessary at a national level for the local activist groups. The name Gay Activists Alliance was chosen for the umbrella organisation. A statement of aims was agreed as follows—"The aim of the GAA is to co-ordinate at a national level the fight against the increasing attacks being made on homosexuality and homosexuals. We see our struggle as part of that of other oppressed people and therefore we seek to win the active participation of the maximum number of gay and non-gay individuals and organisations in this aim."

A second conference was held in Manchester on April 1st and 2nd in which information was exchanged and workshops were held on several issues the harassment of gay people in Manchester with the threat of prosecution for 'licentious dancing', lesbians and the GAA, Law Reform in Scotland, the threat of the National Front and the banning of *Gay News* by W.H. Smiths.

The main discussion, however, centred on the organisation of the GAA itself. First, should it have an explicit socialist commitment or be a coalition of gay activist groups drawing in as many people as possible. Secondly, should it be a delegate conference or try to draw together what ever groups and individuals who may wish to attend. The latter arguments won in both cases.

The address of the secretariat is

Brighton GAA/Lambda, Box 449, Ship Street, Brighton
BN1 1UU. Tel. Brighton 202930.

TROTSKYISM AND GAYS IN THE USA

You may be interested in hearing about what's happening here within the Gay Left movement, and sympathetic straight movement. This sympathetic movement is small. The largest political groups are hostile to gays, and to larger sexual questions. Most of the 30 or so Trotskyist groups are either ignorant of anything but the transitional programme, or open to recruitment of gays, but not open to the independent organisation of gays.

The largest group of left gays was in Los Angeles--you've probably heard of them, the Lavender & Red Union. Well, the L&RU is no more. After spending a year or two studying political questions (and nothing else), they decided that the ultra-sectarian Spartacus League was the group for them. In a large public meeting held in L.A., with all 30 of the L&RU people on stage, they announced they wanted to build the correct leadership. Now those members have been dispersed throughout the country, and are discouraged from proclaiming their politics where they are. As long as everything different about them is hidden under sheets, that's fine.

The right turn of events (Supreme Court rulings, Anita Bryant, etc.) has made the largely male gay movement (the lesbian movement appears, from the outside, to be fairly hidden within separatism) more political—but *not* necessarily more left wing. In San Francisco, where the male population between the ages of 21-50 is estimated to be one-third gay, many groups are operating within the Democratic Party.

I'm a member of the International Socialist Organisation, the fraternal group of the British SWP. We haven't found the same problems that Bob Cant has run up against, although we're a much smaller group, with a very informal leadership structure. An end to discrimination in all forms is one of our political stands. Our paper, and I'd be blind to miss it, carries little on gays other than workplace stuff which is tame. We did carry an interview with Kate Millet, and why she is being cast out for her sexual preferences by the Democratic wing of the feminist movement.

The real trick is for us to translate our official stand into our regular political work and into our personal lives, to incorporate an understanding of sexual politics into our work.

Kent Worcester, 88 Fisher Ave, Boston, Ma. 02120, USA.

Lesbians SplAID

by Sue Cartledge

I was on my way to a Lesbian Left meeting one January evening when suddenly the word that dare not speak its name confronted me on every news-stand: LONDON'S LESBIAN BABIES! EVENING NEWS EXCLUSIVE! it screamed in foot high letters.

Thus was the unsuspecting commuter introduced to a story that seemed a winning gutter-press combination of perverted sex, shady medical ethics ("Dr. Strange Love"), and innocent babies; with a dash of racism thrown in. In the ensuing days the "extraordinary and disturbing case" of a doctor (full name published to make sure everyone knew he was Jewish), who had helped a handful of lesbians to have children by artificial insemination, received extensive coverage in the press, on radio, and on television.

He Called Me Daddy

Few other papers descended to the level of the *Evening News*, who not only engaged in extensive betrayals of confidence to get the original story, but proceeded thereafter to adopt a tone of high-minded self righteousness. They claimed they had withheld the names and photographs of one household at the request of the people concerned, but failed to mention that the request had been backed up by the threat of a legal injunction. There were, of course, the inevitable cartoons of hefty tweed-suited ladies exclaiming "He called me Daddy!". But the press generally chose to adopt the tone of reason ("cause for concern") rather than the original hysteria of the *Evening News* ("BAN THESE BABIES"). However in many ways the reasoned arguments of the liberal press are a clearer reflection of the prevailing attitudes towards women, children, gays and the family, and a better guide to just what we have to fight, than the prurient hypocrisy of the *News*.

Life Without Father

The nation's dial-an-expert service was on 24 hour standby that week, breathlessly awaiting their chance to weigh in with their opinions. Conservative Members of Parliament Jill Knight and Rhodes Boyson ("This evil must stop") were predictable. But 'liberal' child expert Mia Kellmer Pringle put her finger on the basic reason for all this fuss: "There is evidence that some boys brought up without a father figure have difficulty in establishing normal heterosexual relationships". Poor things, just think what they're missing ... and note the greater importance of boys' sexuality. No one seemed particularly worried about how the girls might grow up. The *Evening News* stated clearly that its main objection to lesbian mothers was that their children might not grow up straight: "Will they too be likely to become homosexuals? What are their prospects of security and happiness?" Even Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* closed a fairly sympathetic article by quoting a researcher investigating lesbian parenthood: "There seems not to be any harmful effect on children's psychosexual development". For 'psychosexual development' read 'learning to be heterosexual'.

Grave Threat to Nation

One could search in vain through the columns of the press for one person prepared to say: So what if the kids *did* grow up to be homosexual? The message was, we may tolerate those unfortunates who are already queer but for god's sake don't let's have them breeding any more! Meanwhile a paradoxical and vital statistic was overlooked: 99% of existing homosexuals have heterosexual parents! Perhaps the *Evening News* could suggest what could be done about this grave threat to the moral health of the nation ...?

Member of Parliament Drafts Eleventh Commandment

Sympathetic comment was largely confined to quoting cases of happy, stable, well off lesbian households with happy, stable, normal, blond, blue-eyed kids. Don't worry, folks, these funny people also renovate marble fireplaces, just like real families. And features of heterosexual nuclear family life, like wife battering, child-battering, alcoholism and the rising divorce rate, were suddenly and mysteriously forgotten. "A child needs above all a normal and natural family environment", stated Jill Knight. While Rhodes Boyson considered that "to bring children into this world without a natural father is evil and selfish".

Cornflakes

There was plenty of "concern" and "worry" about the hostile attitudes the children could encounter at school and in the outside world. But it didn't seem to occur to these same concerned people that maybe they should be trying to change these attitudes, rather than attempting the impossible task of ensuring that no child ever grows up except in a white, anglo-saxon, protestant, nuclear cornflakes packet family. Likewise none of the experts thought to draw attention to society's signal failure to provide money and help for children and their parents in the form of adequate child benefits, nurseries etcetera, just so long as they grow up "normal".

Lesbian Knocks Sacred Cow

It was left to Pat Arrowsmith to make the bold suggestion that the nuclear family may have its drawbacks: "Many people argue that capitalism is based on the whole concept of the family in manageable units. I think that this tight unit is itself rather unhealthy ... there is far too much sense of owning a child." But she was alone in putting forward a socialist and feminist perspective. None of the other commentators, except in the left press, seemed aware that many women, and some men, are trying to bring up children in a different way. The mother-child bond shone unquestioned. In the end, when you scratched the surface of the quality press, it really looked quite like the gutter press underneath—"They might grow up queer" screeched the reactionaries. "No, no it's O.K., they'll probably grow up normal", reassured the liberals. Know your enemies.

BRITAIN'S
BIGGEST
EVENING
SALE

Evening News

LONDON FRIDAY JANUARY 6 1978 5p

LATE
SPECIAL
CITY PRICES

MPs call for strict new laws

'BAN THESE BABIES'

Two Steps Forward

Coming Out Six Years On by John Shiers

There are an enormous number of areas in the experience of being gay which have yet to be explored. Thus it is still possible to find problems we experience in everyday life continue to be non-issues. The barriers which are built up to avoid raising certain kinds of questions are as great as they ever were. There is a gap between how I believe I ought to live, feel and act as a person committed to a broad socialist-feminist perspective, and how I actually do live, what I feel inside and the things I do as a gay man in this society. Perhaps for the traditional left this is not an issue at all: it is "idealist" to attempt to change your life, better to sublimate all hang ups in working for the revolution. But once you come to accept that "the personal is political", the way we live as people cannot be ignored any longer. I want, in this article, to write about my experiences not in coming out but in being "out" because I feel, six years after openly defining myself as gay, that a whole new series of issues, which I define as "problems", have emerged so intensely that I have longer and longer periods where I feel totally screwed up inside.

What "coming out" did for me

Like many others who came out into GLF, I found the initial experience tremendously liberating. My sexuality, the part of me with which I most strongly identified and most intensely denied, was no longer hidden, no longer even bad: but something positive, good, perhaps even better than the heterosexual, gender-defined norm. I threw myself rapidly into GLF and its ideology because it seemed to relate to my experience, to articulate my oppression. I particularly identified with feminist ideas because as well as my submerged sexuality, I had always felt inadequate as a male; never found myself able to play the role that most other blokes I met before GLF played. Understanding sexism and the oppression of women seemed like the key which unlocked the prison gates.¹

GLF thus gave me confidence for the first time in my life: the confidence to be proud of my sexuality. It also gave me an ideology that located my oppressors: capitalism and male-ness, and a movement in which I could work for change. While I had previously agreed with socialist goals, I had never been able to cope with the heaviness and severity of members of revolutionary groups I had met and the whole "macho" aura they exuded.

But years of self oppression, combined with my childhood experiences, had taken their toll in terms of my self-image and way of relating to others. These things I couldn't explore in GLF—and only dimly recognised at the time in myself. While we constantly talked about "making the personal political", it was always easier to blow up enormous personal conflicts between ourselves than it was to open up about deeply rooted feelings and experiences.

I felt acutely unattractive: hideous even, right through the year that I was a member of Lancaster GLF. I never dared admit this to anyone yet it was one of the basic underlying feelings that I took with me into every situation when I was with gay people. I found it virtually impossible to envisage that anyone towards whom I was attracted sexually could ever feel the same way towards me. The costs of rejection from people in the group were so great that I only dared risk making any indications to people that I was attracted to them outside of it. That meant at periodic visits to conferences or to London GLF where rejection mattered less since I didn't have to see the person every day (and anyway the people in these contexts were far more bold in telling you if they fancied you than we were in Lancaster!) and at monthly parties above a snack bar in Lancaster (the nearest thing to a commercial scene which existed in that part of the North West).

The political and sexual parts of myself rapidly became totally fragmented: I could unendingly argue about the

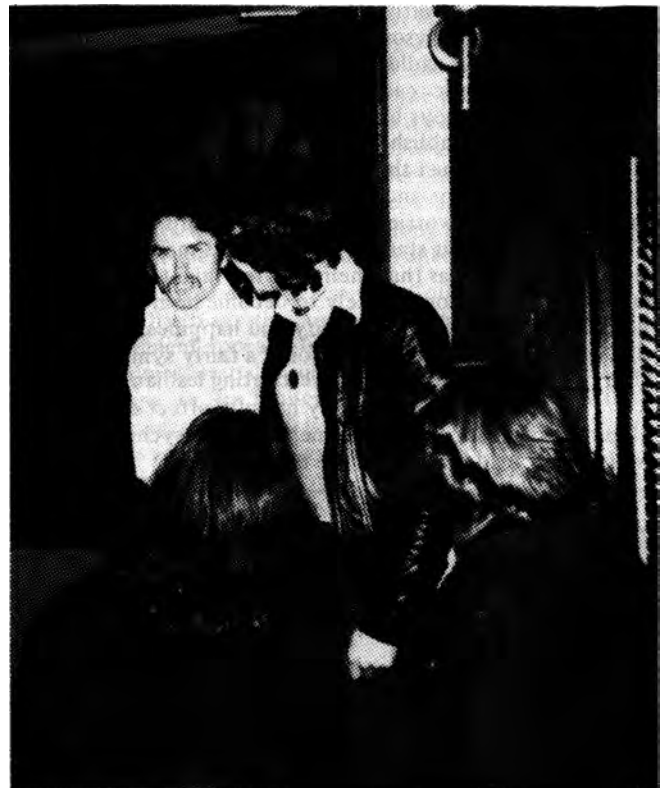
politics of gay liberation; support new people just coming out and appear "sussed out", but at the same time feel inside totally inadequate at actually having gay relationships. While I overcame the worst feelings of self-disgust, purely because people sometimes did seem interested in me for my body and not just for my mind, I have still in no way gone beyond the fragmentation: in some ways it is worse than ever.

Exploring the commercial gay scene

Throughout my time at Lancaster and the following year at York I was scared of what we defined as the "gay ghetto"—gay bars and clubs. In the group we had a very ambiguous attitude towards it. On the one hand, we condemned it because of the money the owners and managers were making out of gay people; for the values that developed in the people who used it and for its sexism, ageism and commercialism. On the other hand, many of us (particularly the men) were fascinated by it and greatly tempted by it.

It wasn't until I moved to Manchester, the first place I'd lived which actually had any sizable commercial scene, that I really began to explore it in any serious way. I found that the bars and clubs attracted me and repulsed me at the same time. On the one hand it all seemed so exciting, a magic fantasy world where, for an hour or so on a club dance floor, I could simply *be*, transcend all the hassles of the real world. On the other hand it was all so uptight and unpolitical compared with GLF. I felt guilty going down to it: particularly because I seemed to be going more often than my friends. But I rationalised (of course!) that I was taking GLF ideas into the grass roots from which it needed to build its base. I was there not because I actually needed the company like everyone else but because I could aid the politicisation of the vast mass of gay people!

At some point which I can't clearly recall, I found the reverse was happening. It wasn't me who was changing the gay scene, but the gay scene which was changing me. It happened first in quite subtle ways: I began to be concerned about whether I was wearing 'suitable' clothes and whether I



Two lesbians being refused admission to Napoleon's club during a picket by gay activists in April 1977.

..... One Step Back

was parting my hair in the 'right' way. Then my absorption became more self-evident: should I wear gay badges all the time in pubs and clubs because they might put people off; should I talk to anyone around whether or not I was attracted to them or would they get the 'wrong idea' from me being friendly with them; how strongly should I argue with people who said things I considered to be gross?

As the "alternative" gay lifestyle which GLF promised, began to wither and decay, so my dependence on the commercial gay scene increased. The ideas that I felt so committed towards became ideals, beliefs which seemed impossible to live out. Gay men were not the potential revolutionaries just waiting for the word of gay liberation to inspire them to political struggle that I had, in my innocence, thought. Gay women I met outside of lesbian groups and uninfluenced by feminist ideas were no more likely to rise up in spontaneous anger against male dominance either. The barriers in communication and lifestyle between "revolutionary" gays and "ordinary" lesbians and gay men seemed more like a brick wall. There was no way that in our role as gay liberationists we could get through. Some people in the face of this had withdrawn totally from the scene in disillusionment. I carried on going to pubs and clubs mostly because, as I've said, I needed the company: it was somewhere to go. I also have the feeling however, that withdrawing can simply mean avoiding confronting the reality which has to be changed. Keeping "pure" ideologically and socially can easily end up as a new form of elitism which judges and despises the way of life of everyone else. The success rate that gay liberationists like me have had simply in keeping our own lifestyle and values together is, however, hardly a model to inspire those who regard it as a cop-out.

Copping out in clubs

What participating on the commercial scene showed me, too, was that however much I have solidarity with the oppression of lesbians, however much I enjoy the friendship of women, I remain a man and as such need the company of other gay men as well as close emotional relationships with women. This really hit home when it became obvious that lesbians were being discriminated against in admission to the two gay clubs in Manchester. One club banned at the time all women unless they looked "feminine" enough to satisfy the whims of the management; the other has a male-only membership and women are only allowed in if accompanied by a member (read man). While a number of us protested frequently about this, and some of us made token attempts to change their policies, first by a picket and leafleting outside one of the clubs, then by a petition. When it came to the crunch none of us, including myself, was prepared to take action which would result in our being expelled from the clubs, or to boycott them as an individual protest. We valued our gay social lives more than the principle of outright opposition to misogynist male managements. The one disco per week which comprises the sole remnant of an alternative gay scene simply did not provide us with sufficient opportunities to mix with other gay men. We could not cut ourselves off from the only places where it is possible to meet and relax with one another. We have completely accepted the terms laid down for us by the rip-off club owners for relating to one another.

Coping with sexual needs

The fragmentation between my "political" self and my "sexual" self which began in Lancaster has, of course, been compounded a thousand times over since I've begun to go to the commercial gay scene. I have never resolved my basic self-disgust at myself; consequently I've never let anyone relate sexually to me for more than a few weeks. My sexual and emotional responses are totally disconnected from each other. I have friends, women and men whom I care a lot for and feel close to and casual sexual encounters with people

who then get to be defined as "friends" (and therefore not sexual partners) or who disappear altogether from my life.

Sex becomes a means of affirming to myself that other people can find me attractive; physically can like my body. If I go for more than a month without any sexual encounter. I just feel permanently depressed. I get deep feelings of self-worthlessness. That is how I've come to dabble with cottaging (which is counter-productive because the guilt after the encounter is worse than the depression which leads me to go in the first place) and gay saunas (which are at least in physically comfortable surroundings).

The other side of this inverse narcissism is that I can only sexually relate to people who are socially defined as highly physically attractive. I am relating to their bodies not to them (which is why I can so often sleep with people with whom I have nothing remotely in common): I would like my body to be like theirs. Through sex I can, for a few moments, "become" the body of someone who is not disgusting like my internal self perceives me to be.

Basically, I would like my sexuality to be integrated into my friendships and emotional relationships. Sex seems to have a symbolic meaning inside my head which gives it little or no connection at all with feelings of emotional commitment. So it becomes almost totally commoditised.

Living with the contradictions

It shocks me how well I can present a public image of being "sorted out". I can function in daily life, I can participate in the work routine and have close friendships with people, I can belong to "Friend" and help some gays through the first stages of accepting their sexuality. Yet I can't stand being on my own for any length of time. I go through long periods of feeling how meaningless everything is. I reject every attempt anyone makes to have an ongoing sexual relationship with me. My "public" and "private" lives seem totally divorced.

What is worst of all is that I experience discontent yet do not know how to begin to change and however much I talk to friends about things, analyse the problems, they still remain. Yet I have the feeling that I'm not that peculiar. Many others share similar feelings although their social experiences and contexts are different. Perhaps in writing this article I'm also asking whether it's time to move on in gay liberation thinking. Shouldn't we start examining some of the "internal" factors which generate our oppression, how "the system" gets into our system. How to cope with and change our psychic structures which have been shaped in a sexist capitalist world that is also the world we have to survive in but at the same time work to transform. Where, in brief, we go after we're out.

Making sense of it

This article has been highly personal and, at times, painful to write because none of the issues it raises have been resolved. But I think it is important to abstract from the personal and see whether it has anything more general to say about both the first phase of the gay liberation movement and directions towards which we might be moving today.

Firstly it seems clear to me now that GLF ideology (I) was rife with individualistic assumptions about the potential of individuals to change by their own efforts. It assumed that a lifetime of conditioning could be magically whisked away by one simple act of coming out. While the analysis was of the structural factors which generate oppression, the practice was based on individual self-change as if this was boundless. Changing our lifestyles and challenging ideologically the gender role system is not going to make the revolution. This is no reason not to attempt to make such changes and to challenge sexist ideology, but it is reason to really take account of the deep barriers both personal and social which we have to confront and to examine ways of gradually chipping down.

Equally there are dimensions of self which are rooted in our underlying psychic structure: largely hidden from our consciousness but powerful in motivating our actions and shaping our feelings. Perhaps one task of gay socialists should not be simply to keep the flame of gay liberation ideas alive but to pioneer new kinds of group which do seek to reach that underlying psychic structure. Maybe it is only from beginning to bring that level to consciousness that the foundations for a revolutionary psychology can be built: one from which we all could benefit.²

Secondly, my anxiety has been exacerbated by the lack of any norms to provide me with guidelines as to what kind of personal relations I "should" be working towards. Having rejected the bourgeois norm of the happy heterosexual couple, what kinds and quality of relationships are the goal of gay liberation? In GLF there seemed to be a vague belief in the "eroticisation of everyday life", of sex no longer being a "special" act done in "special" places with "special" people, but merely an extension of a general sensuality which would be part of all relationships. I have never met anyone who has achieved this goal. Few of us have even begun to break down our stereotypes despite mouthing attacks on "ageism", "sexual objectification" etc. The male gay scene offers the possibility of sex disconnected in any meaningful way from emotional relationships. This route is the route which has been traditionally taken by probably the majority of gay men who have got as far as meeting others socially at all, but still at the back of their minds (and mine) there is usually a strong desire for an intense one-to-one relationship.

Could we not be working out more clearly the kinds of social/sexual relations which advance the development of a gay liberationist consciousness and way of life, and which are merely the result of a brutalisation of our lives under capitalism, a reduction of others to objects which we can consume and a making of ourselves into objects for consumption? I don't mean that this should be done in a moralistic way of laying down new "you should's" and "you shouldn't's": there was too much of that in GLF. But through thought, discussion and sharing of experience, and probing of the internal and external forces which keep us committed to life-styles we feel discontent about, new possibilities may emerge. At the moment, I am particularly vulnerable to whatever norms get to be thrown up in the social groups of which I am a member. Since I, like many others, have come to depend on the gay scene, I am particularly likely to be influenced by the norms which emerge "within the walls" of the scene itself.

Thirdly, we grossly under-estimated in GLF the capacity of capitalist enterprises to colonise gay men. We tried to avoid confronting the gay scene altogether, hoping that some mass conversion would turn out all its participants from the bars and into our ranks. But the reality is that they can provide better facilities than we could in a material sense, more regular meeting places and more exciting discos. Socially we could not compete and little attempt was made in GLF to welcome people who did not already have a fairly clearly defined left-wing stance.

In many small towns up and down the country the bar is, literally, all that there is for gays in the area (apart of course for the public conveniences which become cottages for gay men). Since commercial facilities are obviously going to be the main places where gay men and probably lesbians too, are going to meet for a long time to come, gay liberationists in the gay movement ought to be starting to press organisations like CHE and NOOL to organise effective campaigns to prevent at the very least sexual or racial or class discrimination in access to these facilities. How this is to be done in local areas and nationally I don't know, but surely we should immediately put it on the agenda both as a serious gay issue and for action. ³ Maybe rip-off, mysogynist gay capitalists do determine many of the places we meet, but why should they have everything their own way?⁴

Fourthly, a lot more attention needs to be paid to the provision of decent alternative social facilities in areas large enough to sustain gay groups. The total inadequacy of gay commercial facilities as genuine centres of gay community can be seen by briefly looking round at the groups of people who are absent from them, not by those who are present.



Places like the Birmingham Community Centre perhaps pave the way for what could exist in a lot more areas. The problem is centrally to do with who does the work to get alternative facilities together. How much time is it reasonable to expect individuals to give up in organising social events? When they are provided without the hassle by private enterprise, it is tempting to give up the laborious process of hiring rooms and equipment for discos; making sure Gay Centres are adequately staffed etc. When the collective anger that partially gave rise to GLF dissipated, did the desire to create a radically different form of community life dissipate, too? I would like to see local gay groups more concerned about the kinds of community they wish to build in their areas and the kind of facilities the members feel they need, just as much as I want to see them working to prevent discrimination in commercial facilities.

I hope this article has not given the impression that here is poor, weak, innocent John Shiers who has got sucked into a nasty, horrible gay world which is fucking him up. I actively sustain my lifestyle: I am not like a pinball being pushed around without any power to stop the cycle. I choose to use commercial gay facilities; I consent to the one night stands;

I also have a fairly satisfying and enjoyable social life quite independent from all of this. Yet my choices are not "free": I have needs which gnaw away under the surface and which gay bars, clubs and sex do provide temporary relief for. But it is temporary: the underlying issues remain and I have no idea how to begin to go about fully understanding them, let alone sorting them out in such a way as to give me a constant feeling of personal integration.

Part of me says "be realistic; realise that personal integration is an illusion in this society. Accept yourself as you are because it's not that terrible". Yet I can't totally accept that. Another part of me says, "NO—struggle against your fragmentation", for it is the awareness of fragmentation that sustains emotionally and not just intellectually my socialist commitment". And perhaps after all that is the chief gain, six years on.

Notes

- 1 My new ideology went something like this. Men oppress women by their "maleness", by "machismo". Male dominance is structured into all the institutions of society; into our whole culture and way of life and into our most intimate personal relations. Heterosexual relations are the lynchpin which holds together the gender role system. The rejection of heterosexuality is thus a revolutionary act, particularly for women, but probably also for men because it provides them with the possibility of developing non-gender defined ways of relating both to themselves and to women. GLF meant more than being simply a campaigning organisation; it was a way of life which, alongside the Women's Movement, was to revolutionise personal relationships. Through the transformation of the "personal", the consciousness of the necessity to transform the capitalist economic system would also develop, since capitalism was built round sustaining the power, wealth and status of a small number of white, economically exploitative men. The rest of us were conned by the subtle kinds of divisions which translated capitalist authority relations into all social relations. This could be blown wide open by women—gay and straight and gay men collectively rejecting male power. The

result would be the rejection of all authority relations in capitalist society since they are built round the "first" authority relation—the power of the man.

- 2 I think it is important not just to develop a psychological theory: but also techniques of therapy. Even if (a big if) a revamped Freud does have a contribution to make to understanding the human psyche under patriarchy (as Keith Birch was suggesting in "Politics and Ideology"/*Gay Left* 5, how can we go about beginning to liberate ourselves from our pasts? By psychoanalysis?
- 3 An illustration of the lack of importance which this issue at present merits can be seen in the refusal of *Gay News* to publish either of the articles we sent it about our activities in relation to the two, sexist, Manchester clubs. Any campaign would also have to be properly co-ordinated. There was simply too few people involved in ours and little enthusiasm from lesbians themselves to participate. They either weren't interested in going to the clubs or thought that it was impossible to change the clubs' policies anyway. The majority of gay men we talked to, while agreeing with

us that discrimination against lesbians was bad, were worried about getting on bad terms with the management of the clubs. Such is the power of club managements in their quasi-monopolistic position in all parts of the country outside London.

- 4 There is also an important political point to bear in mind in such a campaign: that in opposing discrimination in clubs, what is being opposed is the right of men to restrict access from social facilities to women. If women (or any other groups at present in the process of defining an autonomous identity for themselves from their dominators) choose to set up their own clubs and restrict access to them from men, this I consider to be quite acceptable. To refuse to support male only gay clubs but to support the right of women only clubs is a recognition of the specific oppression women experience from men. If this view is generally accepted, it makes the terms of such a campaign an important issue to discuss, particularly in organisations composed mainly or entirely of men such as CHE.

Julia

A Review by Bob Cant

Hollywood has been one of the major agencies in creating images of women in the past half-century. The child like qualities of Pickford in the 20s, the glamour of Dietrich and Garbo in the 30s, the toughness of Bacall, Davis and Lupino in the 40s and the vulnerability of Monroe in the 50s were highly important in moulding images of women at the time. These representations are also a useful indication to us of the way in which Western society has altered its perception of relationships as a whole. The disappearance of women from many Hollywood films in the last decade reflects the way in which the women's movement has forced a re-examination of women's roles and the origins of these roles. The production of films like *Julia* (and also the *The Turning Point*) in which women are portrayed as active and creative was a welcome end to this period of silence. But welcome though this change is, how significant is it?

Firstly *Julia* was made for 20th Century Fox. Doubtless, the directors of Fox have as little difficulty in accepting the profits from this feminist film as they did in accepting the profits made from the exploitation of Marilyn Monroe. Secondly, the director of *Julia* is Fred Zinneman who is not a woman. More importantly, he has also made films like *High Noon* which preach good old American values like individualism and renunciation. Thirdly, the stars of the film, Jane Fonda and Vanessa Redgrave, are world famous not only for their screen performances but also for their off-screen activities. The value, for Hollywood, of Fonda's support for the struggle of the Vietnamese people and Redgrave's Trotskyism, is that they are extra curiosity factors in selling the film.

Despite all this, I liked the film. It was good to leave the cinema with elderly women who, for once, were able to see a screen representation of women of their generation as something other than the butts of humour or pity.

The central relationship between Julia and Lilian Hellman is depicted as a close, warm relationship between two women who are attempting to have some control over their own destinies. One is a doctor and the other a writer; they are both involved with men without being dependent on them. Their political involvement, and that of other anti-fascist women, is a testimony to the activity of many women against Hitler and Nazism. The images they project of independence and creativity are powerful and welcome despite their base in private incomes unavailable to most of the population.

The two women work to develop their relationship on their own terms away from traditional inhibiting stereotypes. The openness and warmth of their commitment to each other is the single most validating feature of the film. The attack which Hellman makes on the man who implies that she has a lesbian relationship with Julia is the response

not of a closet homosexual, but of a proud woman defending herself from the pathetic sneers of a man who cannot conceive of any integrity in relationships which are lacking heterosexual intercourse. In this context, it is a surprising omission of the film that we are never told that the theme of the play we see her writing, *The Children's Hour*, is lesbianism.

The rest of the film is pure Hollywood—the flashbacks to happy childhood memories, the first night success of the new playwright, Americans in Paris, the Hitchcockian train journey and the search for Julia's child around bakers' shops of Alsace. All these are in the best entertainment tradition of the Hollywood comedy/thriller—but really no more. Hollywood has certainly not overturned its conventions in its acknowledgement of feminism.

Indeed, when we look at some of the other films recently produced by Hollywood we see that its conventions as a whole remain unshaken. *Bobby Deerfield* is a seductively made film about how a world famous racing driver can only find himself through his love for a dying heiress. *Looking for Mr Goodbar* relates how a teacher of the deaf is killed by a bisexual hustler whom she meets in a singles bar. *Choirboys* perpetuates the crude Hollywood tradition of portraying women as either hysterical or nymphomaniac, if they are portrayed at all; but then this film also degrades gays, Vietnamese etc etc—something to offend everyone.

Despite the fact that *Julia* is worth seeing it has to be judged in the context of films produced by a profit-oriented, long-established, patriarchally-dominated system. That system is far from crumbling when it co-opts feminist themes into its films. It is extending its terms of reference and corrupting these themes in the process. Feminist films can only be made by feminist teams of film makers.



Homosexuals, Children & Violence

by Guy Hocquenghem

from *Gaie Presse*, numero 1, Paris, January 1978.

Edited, translated, and introduced by Simon Watney.

Guy Hocquenghem has been a leading member of the French Gay Movement since the "events" of 1968. His first book, *Le Desir Homosexuel*, appears in an English translation later this year. The present article, taken from the very welcome new French radical gay paper, *Gaie Presse*, pursues some of the themes dealt with in the book, namely, the sources of anti-homosexual manifestations and the submission of gays to dominant heterosexual models. He also examines some aspects of gay politics in France in the context of the recent elections, as well as the wider international situation, significantly, perhaps, ignoring the situation in the U.K.. I have slightly shortened the original text and given it a title and internal headings.

Morality and Consensus Politics

During the last six months to a year there has been a change in the consensus of opinion regarding sexual liberties and, in particular, the relations between children and adults. Up till now we have all been living under the illusion that we were following a continuous and progressive movement towards greater sexual freedom, partly for the population as a whole, and partly for children. It is this double illusion which we now have to denounce.

There is one historical experience which it is important to cite here, that of Hirschfeld in Germany, who achieved massive and important results when the League for Sexual Reform counted hundreds of thousands of followers. Hirschfeld practically achieved the abolition of the Article 175 on the German penal code which condemned homosexuality. And at that very moment a very brutal reversal of public opinion took place.

The illusion, that liberal positions can be bought and provide us with new points of departure, is complete.

There is no area in which a more brutal reversal of ideology and consensus politics is being made than that of morality. It is an extremely changeable area in which opinion may completely alter within an year. I am not saying that this is totally what is happening in France; but this tendency is contradictory to the sexual liberation movements as they have developed. Such a fluctuation has displaced the problem of liberation. It has displaced it from the point where it was situated in the period of Gay Liberation Fronts to another problem, permitting many more severe and effective repressions — the problem of the protection of childhood — on which the consensus is much more easy to realize.

The Role of the Press

In this sense we see that the Anita Bryant case was at first treated as a joke (*plaisanterie*) and then effectively turned into a populist movement. Anita Bryant's initial argument is not to say that homosexuals are monsters, but to say 'Save Our Children'.

A special kind of press campaign has developed, the history of which is interesting since it began with the American dispatch agencies and carried on with a big article in the Springer group German newspaper, *Der Spiegel*, and was taken up more recently in France with an article in *Le Monde* and finally with a dossier in *Le Nouvel Observateur* entitled 'Pornography and the Exploiters of Children'.

The Journalists are relaying a species of police scoop, making it journalistic and extremely marketable of course,

since it is itself on the limits of pornography, and consists of describing in detail the states of vice and depravity to which the liberation of minors might lead, in particular the liberation of homosexuality, by the effect it has on children and, in particular, on child prostitution and child pornography.

This campaign has even caught on in 'The East, since Paradjanov¹ has been accused of child-rape after having been accused for a long time of homosexuality; such is the combative displacement. Firstly, one discovers child prostitution. This is extremely astonishing if one considers on the one hand the body of literature which has been devoted to it, and on the other hand the fact that it has been a massive and endemic evil since the Nineteenth Century which, moreover, the principal laws of that period were essentially aimed at.

As for the disquiet felt by the *Nouvel Observateur* journalist at prostitution as such, she starts off from a 'given' that child prostitution is 'particularly odious'. One must carefully weigh up the sense of this 'particularly', for it is this that permits the transference of meaning to different levels.

Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

Child prostitution is equated with child pornography. Both are seen as 'particularly odious' because, with regard to children, all sexual acts or erotic relationships are seen as 'particularly odious'. In order to make the machinery which makes children untouchable function, it is indispensable to associate childhood sexuality with crime, drugs, pornography. It is a method which, working by associations, is not particularly new. But the organization of its discourse — that is to say, the way in which terms which have nothing to do with one another are made to appear to follow on, the one from the other, like homosexuality, prostitution, child pornography and then sodomy (which is simply and solely a sexual act) — all that ends up creating a sort of unformulated evidential base for public opinion which understands precisely what is being driven at. Whether it is prostitution or pornography, the issue is all sexual relations with children. And for that unformulated position to be constituted satisfactorily it is necessary that a certain number of archaic ideas such as buggery are mixed up with very modern notions such as interference with children, drugs, etc ...

The Monster on Everybody's Doorstep

One of the essential arguments of this new campaign is the association with violence. It is necessary on the part of the journalists to enlarge upon police communiques, to 'psychologize' them, to give them a human presence, so that the monster must seem to be at the same time on everybody's doorstep whilst at the same time he must be completely and utterly unformulated. The method lies in the description of the monster. One mustn't seek to know what he does or what he might do; every detail one is given of him only confirms that he is indeed the monster through and through.

Thus, at the end of the *Nouvel Observateur* article, the journalist decides to actually 'meet' a paedophile and falls upon this individual who appears as monstrous in making love with kids (*gosse*) as in the strange blue glow behind his eyes ... the ring on his finger ... All this is extremely disquieting.

The Criminal without Crime

One more remark: the sado-masochist style, or the vogue in leather in certain homosexual milieux, is systematically associated with violence itself. In this same set of ideas one can end up saying that a man in leather is a violent man, a criminal, since he wears the signs of violence. The same thing happens moreover with the Punks who wear Nazi insignia;



because they wear Nazi insignia they must be Nazis. Here an extremely interesting criminal appears, since this is a criminal without crime. But what has been made up by the papers which press this particular campaign has a direct influence on the men of the law. A consensus is established between sexual morality and the elections in which even the ecologists take their place along side of the *Nouvel Observateur*, the Socialist Party, and Chirac² who has renewed raids on the public gardens and the saunas, by their very backwards looking position on different kinds of sexuality. Certain of them are not far from considering these as pollutants. Thus, in the journal of the Ecologists Committee of St. Germain one reads of 'certain ignoble scenes which carry on around our public lavatories'.

The barristers are at enormous pains to defend their stated case, that 'the turner aside of minors runs the risk of being suspected of having a certain inclination for crime itself'. It is easier today to defend a criminal responsible for the deaths of a dozen people than a homosexual or a pederast.

NOTES

1. Paradjanov. Russian film director. Convicted in Kiev in 1974 of 'incitement to suicide' and sent to a Labour Camp. Recently released.
2. M. Jaques Chirac, the Gaullist Mayor of Paris.

Capitalism and the Family

Agenda Publishing Company. San Francisco, 90p.

Reviewed by Simon Watney

The Introduction to *Capitalism and the Family* notes, in familiar reverential terms, the mutual influence of traditional socialist theory and the "critical self-analysis" of the women's movement on one another, concluding that this has led to a more advanced understanding of contemporary capitalism "as a complex social form". Unfortunately David Fernbach's essay, 'Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation', does not fulfil this promise, largely due to its dogmatic Freudianism.

His analysis of the process of gender identification would, for example, have us believe that all girls "have to repress their autonomous clitoral sexuality ... seek satisfaction in being penetrated by the penis"; and that all boys, regardless of class or culture, are brought up to "devalue women", to "cultivate an aggressive sexuality" etc. As in all such abstract psychologising, empirical observation is strained through an inflexible model of child development which is believed to obey its own "laws" which, in familiar Structuralist jargon, are held to be "autonomous". Any empirical observations which might seriously challenge the validity of such theories are derided as "empiricist" and are, as such, rejected.

Fernbach rightly argues for separate understandings of the genesis of female and male homosexuality, but locates them solely on the terrain of some purely genital consciousness—penis envy etc. Like Lacan, he assumes a universality of sexual forms which leads both into a similar a-social, a-historical idealism. It is in this manner that we are told that the traditional constraints upon pre-marital heterosexual activity required equally strong constraints against any temptations towards homosexual activity. The argument is neat but spurious, since it confuses institutional proscriptions on the part of both church and state with actual lived human experience. Was pre-marital intercourse unheard of before the pill? Is pre- and extra-marital homosexual activity not successfully institutionalised and contained in many societies, notably Islamic? This is just bad history.

Taboos against homosexuality then are seen as determined by the threat it poses to "the reproduction of labour power". In this way an inflexible economism is operated alongside an inflexible Freudianism. Where one breaks down the other makes do. In this context we recognise the enormous convenience of the vague concept of "relative autonomy", current in so much contemporary "Marxist" thought. For example, if the position of women or male homosexuals

is autonomous (or "semi-autonomous") from capitalism, then their determinants are seen as psychological. Conversely, if the psychology of women or of male homosexuals is seen as autonomous (or "semi-autonomous") then their determinants are seen as economic. All this shows is two inadequate and ostensibly exclusive interpretations of human behaviour locked in circular, if mutually reinforcing, combat.

By far the strongest aspect of Fernbach's paper lies in his insistence that "it is wrong to believe that gay people can be organised against the capitalist state and for socialism on the basis of civil rights". But for no apparent reason gays are supposed, "by definition", to exist outside of the family, and hence, we are told, that area of struggle is closed to us. This seems to me to be an extremely contentious political reading of the realities of most gay people's lived experience of this society, a society which is as we know crucially arranged around the family, for gays as for everybody else. He is thus forced by the logic of his own position to criticise ALL civil rights campaigns as being "non-revolutionary", and concludes with depressing Leninist railings against "opportunism", "reformism" etc.

It is perhaps a little unfair to criticise this essay so comparatively late in the day. It was, after all, first printed in 1973. But in the light of so much contemporary theoreticism it remains vitally important to challenge just this kind of eclectic "fitting-together" of Marxism and psychoanalysis which, in Fernbach's fairly representative case, succeeds only in creating a kind of pseudo-materialist astrology of human behaviour, rather than a dynamic theory of specific historical functions and social formations.

In the last essay in this pamphlet Mina Davis Caulfield argues that men are exploited as social labourers precisely because they can "be more intensively exploited than women, not having to nurse and rear children". It is along these lines that we need to question the terms of our understanding of Gay Liberation, terms borrowed analogically rather than analytically from other political struggles in the 1960s. We need to reject all essentialist notions of homosexuality existing as some kind of quantity either above the history of societies (Marxist Abstract Objectivism) or above the history of specific individuals (Freudianism). We need then to ask how we are constructed rather than how we are supposedly "distorted" from some normative and unchanging gay "essence". At the same time we must not throw out all notions of distortion from our political analysis in timid fear of appearing elitist. For, as materialists, we do indeed claim to "know better".

LOOKING AT PORNOGRAPHY: EROTICA & THE SOCIALIST MORALITY

by Gregg Blachford

One of the main contributions of feminism to socialist political practice is its stress on the necessity of taking the ideas of our political activity and theory into all aspects of our private lives. Feminism has stressed the importance of breaking down the artificial barrier between the personal and the political. We, as gay male socialists, have accepted the validity of this. For us, many areas of our personal lives have changed greatly over the last few years because of our involvement in socialist and feminist political activity, such as as how we relate to the people we live with, to our lovers, to those we work with, etc. But many areas of our personal lives still remain unexplored in terms of connecting them to our political practice. They are mainly connected with sexual behaviour and include masturbation, cruising, cottaging, S/M sex and pornography, not unimportant parts of many gay men's, including gay socialist men's, lives. Much work still has to be done to analyse these activities from a gay socialist perspective, especially since many of them are certainly sexist.

Having accepted the idea that 'the personal is the political' it becomes necessary to evolve a socialist morality. The idea of creating a morality (or passing judgement on what should be considered as 'proper' or 'improper' behaviour) would have been abhorred by the 'do your own thing' libertarians of the '60s and early '70s counter-culture. Also, the strict, anti-sex morality that is imposed in so-called socialist countries like those in Eastern Europe, Cuba and S.E. Asia tends to make us wary of the whole concept of morality. But a commitment to eliminating the personal/political split requires an examination of our personal lives. We must consider the effect that our seemingly 'personal' behaviour has on others.

In this article, I want to examine how pornography can be analysed from a socialist perspective. The definition of it must come first before looking more concretely at the attitudes of political groups to porn and their attempts to get it on or off the shelves of bookshops. What should our attitudes as gay male socialists be to these struggles and especially to the perspective of many feminists? Can pornography have any place in our own lives as we are committed politically to a fight against capitalism and its manifestations in terms of economic exploitation and sexism?

Definition

Writing about pornography is difficult because of its problematic nature, its emotive connotations and because of the many forms that it takes. What is considered to be pornographic varies from culture to culture and from time to time. It cannot be analysed as a concept or as a reality on its own. It must be placed firmly within the structural and historical network of the economic and social relationships from which it springs.

The term pornography itself was first used in the 1860s, meaning literally the photography of prostitutes, but it has its present origins in the 17th century and has persisted, developed and flourished throughout the 19th century to the present. Steven Marcus claims that the growth of porn is inseparable from and dependent on the growth of the novel. Both depended on urbanisation and industrialisation which provided an audience of literate people (while England's population grew fourfold in the 19th century, its literate population grew 32 fold) and a process for mass printing and distribution. During these times of rapid change, there was also the possibility of increased privacy and private experience (an essential element of porn) in the urban areas especially. Sexuality, at the same time, was being confined to a separate and insulated sphere of one's life.

A large part of pornography has to do with fantasy. But how are images of sexual fantasy constructed in our minds? People's fantasies do not materialise randomly, although



Looking At Pc

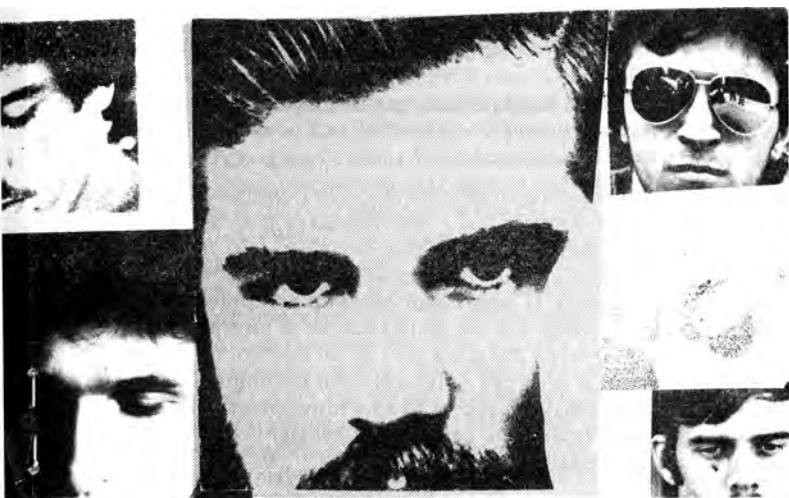


many people commonsensically, believe that their sexuality (images and behaviour) are private and therefore under their total control. But since all societies have to organise and structure sexuality to some degree, values will emerge dealing with how people should handle and think of sexuality. But the exact relationship between these dominant values and the actual behaviour and fantasy that people engage in is not a direct one and quite complicated. Even the limits of acceptable behaviour are not clear-cut. Also, the extent to which people feel guilty or embarrassed if their behaviour or fantasies go beyond that limit is unknown.

Despite the lack of *biological* limits at the level of imagination, it seems necessary that limits on the extent of our sexual behaviour and imagery are set (by some unknown extent) by the ideological values of society. If sexuality is socially constructed at all, it will of necessity be culturally limited.

But saying that sexual fantasy and its concrete form, pornography, are constructed within an ideology is not enough to provide a full definition. It is also necessary to note that the nature of pornography is inherently secret, furtive, guilt-ridden and essentially private. Its subject matter often involves power and violence in a sexual context.

It can be argued that erotica differs from porn in this respect. Erotica can be what is defined as sexually exciting but it may have little association with feelings of guilt or degradation. Art in certain times and societies has been blatantly pornographic by our cultural norms but there are few indicators as to whether it would have been associated with disgust or depravity in the society from which it came. Nevertheless, the line between porn, erotica and art is not clear and is problematic.



Pornography



Attitudes to Pornography

Responses to porn vary considerably and are often related to an individual's political perspective. The conservative, liberal and libertarian arguments have been aired sufficiently and don't need elaboration here. Suffice to say that, although they may seem quite different, they all share the same notion of a 'sex drive', of a biologically rooted 'sexual instinct' which is fundamentally selfish, pleasure-seeking and anarchic. Liberals think that only children and 'sick' individuals are apt to give way to this 'beast' of anarchic selfishness, since socialisation is usually a sufficient check. Therefore porn should be available to those who have been insufficiently socialised so as to provide a safe sexual outlet for them. Conservatives are less optimistic and see this beast lurking very close to the surface in everyone and therefore it needs to be kept closely and continually in check or the social order will be threatened. Therefore porn must be carefully controlled or eliminated if possible, or else it may act as a catalyst to the release of the beast.

The libertarians see the sex drive riot as a beast but as a means of creative self-fulfilment, if it was not twisted and repressed by an oppressive state for its own ends. They would advocate that porn should be published without limits, if there is a market for it, to allow the demand to be satisfied. Whatever forms of sexual pleasure an individual desires should be catered for.

The feminist attitude to pornography and sex is what I want to investigate in most detail as I believe it raises issues central to porn in particular and to "the socialist morality" in general.

Objectification and Exploitation

The basic starting point of many feminists is that society is sexist, a place where men and women are taught and expected to behave differently in all matters and especially in the sexual. Men are given the power to exploit women economically, emotionally and sexually (although not all men use this power). Socialist feminists go further and say that the purpose of this relationship between women and men is for the production and reproduction of social relations in the capitalist mode of production which leads to the maintenance of the status quo. This perspective influences the way in which some feminists view pornography. Their argument can be divided into two sections.

1. Sexist elements of pornography

The publicly available content of sexual fantasy is almost totally defined by male needs, as is the content of pornography. Porn is made by men and for men. Even depictions of lesbian sexual behaviour is sold to men for their titillation. It reinforces the male-dominated view of sexuality which sees men as aggressive and active in sex and women as passive, willing victims. Susan Brownmiller expresses a feminist contempt for porn by seeing it as a reflection of America's cultural output which gives an ideological base to the continuation of female oppression in promoting 'a climate in which acts of sexual hostility directed against women are not only tolerated but ideologically encouraged.' (p.395) She claims that women are disgusted and offended by porn not because they are sexually backward or more conservative by nature, but because of 'the gut knowledge that we and our bodies are being stripped, exposed and contorted for the purpose of ridicule to bolster that "masculine esteem" which gets its kick and sense of power from viewing females as anonymous, panting playthings, adult toys, dehumanised objects to be used, abused, broken and discarded.' (p.394)

Brownmiller links this to the philosophy of rape and says that instead of porn being a 'safety valve', it in fact encourages men to rape or use women whom they have learned are not 'real'. She would also reject the libertarian view and say that individuals are not simply 'doing their own thing' when masturbating to sexist images of women. They are, by extension, objectifying and therefore oppressing all women.

Men have recently been displayed as 'sex objects' in slick American soft-porn magazines such as *Playgirl* and the early *Viva*. One might conclude that the tables are turning. But feminists point to the different ways in which men and women are displayed in these heterosexual mags. The nude men are personalised and their hopes, ambitions and dreams are shown. They are sensitive, creative and deep, absorbed in their own activities, thoughts and bodies. But, at all times, their masculinity is reinforced by the text which underlines the butch message. Stunt man Nick 'takes to chicks and violence the way a duck takes to water.' Shep, a soccer goalkeeper, finds the joys of sex in sport—'a climax and a feeling of conquest'—and vice versa. There is usually at least one outdoors shot to establish how healthy and natural, how basic they really are.

Women, on the other hand, are most often displayed as being conscious of being looked at by men, as being passive, waiting for a man. Little is known or said about them personally and what is said is bland and mundane. 'Sexy Susan' is a secretary and loves looking after her boss. Her leisure interests include sports, fun and sun.' Her personality is relatively unimportant compared to her naked body with breasts and genitals exposed. Therefore the way in which women and men are shown in porn reflect the way in which they are expected to behave in all other areas of their lives.

Gay porn is often no exception to this as it repeats the pattern of one partner dominant; the other submissive:

"Eventually, he turned Marley onto his stomach and pressed his lips into the crevice between the throbbing checks. The whole frame of the smaller man began to tremble, and he begged weakly for Dick to spare him. 'I hardly ever get fucked', he whispered, 'and by God, baby, you're hung like a couple 'a horses....'"

Dick held him firmly against the bed, removing his mouth from the tender channel just long enough to answer. "They all get fucked", he said simply. "There hasn't been a toy in this room that hasn't gotten this iron up his ass!" "

So, most porn, instead of challenging bourgeois notions of sexuality, goes all the way in reinforcing the most traditional views of sex and gender. 'Hard-core pornography is not a celebration of sexual freedom; it is a cynical exploitation of female sexual activity through the device of making all such activity, and consequently all females, "dirty".' (p.393—Brownmiller)

2. Exploitative elements of pornography

The socialist feminists have not only argued against porn from the sexist angle but have also been concerned with the way in which porn exploits its consumers.

Porn has become a big, multi-million pound industry. It has grown along with the development of capitalism. The continual search goes on for higher profits. The method for doing this has become quite sophisticated because what is being sold, especially in soft-core, is more than sex as a commodity itself, but sex as part of a whole lifestyle. A world is conjured up in readers' minds that is slick, glamorous and romantic. And that world is for sale. Sexual success is linked with the professional or business success that is necessary to finance a glamorous lifestyle that will attract the beautiful people in these magazines to the bed of the reader.

America has seen a profusion of mags similar to *Playboy* oriented to a gay market such as *Blueboy*, *Mandate*, *In Touch* and *Playguy*. Homosexuals, feeling less self-oppressed than in previous decades, have reached a point where they are 'open' enough to purchase products that are being marketed exclusively for a gay market. As a result, 'Gay is Good' begins to mean 'good for business'. The following are quotes from advertising magazines:

"Gay money. Twenty-five thousand dollars. That's how much your average gay worker earns in a year. Multiply that by 20 million gay consumers, and you've got an affluent and very powerful market. Gay dollars are just as green as anyone else's. And *West American Advertising* will help you make sure that they stack up in the right place.

What people do in the privacy of their homes is their business—big business."

This gay lifestyle, though, does not speak to or for women or third world peoples or drag queens or anyone else who does not have the privileges needed to exist happily under capitalism.

In conclusion, both the sexist and exploitative elements of pornography set up an ideal world of objects that the readers are expected to desire. Like advertising and the ideology which encourages infinite expectations for 'valued' goods, porn both sets the standards of the commodity market and denies the satisfaction of needs by encouraging insatiable wants and only temporary satisfactions through the creation of an illusory facade of both material goods and physical bodies, which is unobtainable, mystifying and alienating.

In this way capitalism, as it exists, comes under very little real threat from the 'sexual freedom' advocated in porn. Social relations remain stabilised. It shows the ability of capitalism to co-opt potentially threatening groups or attitudes. Its markets can be expanded while ideological control is kept over the thoughts and actions of those in the society. Instead of liberating people sexually, as it claims to do, porn manages to continue to influence sexual thoughts and fantasies which most people believe to be their most private domain, under their own control.

What to do

Unfortunately, knowing the problems with porn does not automatically tell us how to go about solving them, in the same way in which knowing that the image you are masturbating to is sexist, does not stop it from being sexually exciting. The immediate reaction is to ban all forms of pornography by having stronger obscenity laws, a proposal

suggested by both conservatives and some feminists. I want to outline some problems that will inevitably follow this course of action.

Firstly, efforts to legislate porn out of existence on the grounds of obscenity have always failed, not least because of the essentially subjective nature of all attempts to define it.

Secondly, attempting to enforce stronger obscenity laws would necessitate stronger and more repressive state apparatuses such as the police, courts, stiffer sentences, etc. This would be dangerous for the freedom of expression of ideas in areas other than porn. If censorship becomes acceptable, it will not be too difficult for the state to move it into political areas as well. And when the state goes in for control of sexual behaviour, it does not only centre on pornography. Birth-control information, access to abortions, prostitution, male homosexuality and the hard fought for rights of women are attacked at the same time.

Thirdly, the ends of both the Whitehouse morality campaign and feminist campaigns are exactly the same—no porn—even if their reasons for doing so are opposite to each other. Will the mass media be able to understand the differences in the arguments? I doubt it. For example, the campaign by the NUS against sexist student revues was reported by the Press as a prudish anti-sex morals campaign.

Fourthly and finally, as with any commodity in short supply, a black market is bound to emerge which will make porn even more degraded and furtive and may even increase the demand for it. And it will still be available to those with money who will never question why it is being banned. The real basis of sexism would remain untouched while the sex shops in Soho have their front windows smashed.

If the existence of porn is to be threatened, then it must be only part of a much wider campaign to alter sexist social relations. Then men with some knowledge of what sexism means might reflect on the implications of porn for the situation of women and consider not buying it or using it. The threat of a ban could become a form of consciousness-raising and could be more effective than an actual ban.



Gay Male Pornography

Although gay porn has many similar elements to heterosexual porn, there are differences that need to be examined. As I mentioned earlier, gay porn includes the commercially slick American magazines and the broadly similar British *Q International* and *Him Exclusive*. These are aimed primarily at middle class gay men who have money to spare and who want to buy all manner of things befitting a 'gay lifestyle'—

much of it unnecessary. But many working class men who see themselves as homosexual also buy them because it is through these magazines that they find a very acceptable alternative to the only other image of homosexuals that they have seen in the past—the limp-wristed John Inman and Larry Grayson. This may go part of the way in explaining why many working class gay men become middle class in their behaviour and attitudes if they get involved in the gay subculture. Therefore, I believe that these magazines cannot be dismissed so easily out of hand as their heterosexual equivalents because, although the context is clearly exploitative, the images presented are important to many gay men because they furnish evidence that gay male sexuality actually exists! I remember the very exciting feeling I got when I first saw one of these magazines before I came out. There I saw men kissing and holding and loving each other; something that I never thought possible as the mainstream culture manifests itself in overwhelmingly heterosexual and macho terms. It was proof of a homosexual community and it was through porn that I learned of its existence.

The opposite to this is a magazine called *Straight to Hell: The Manhattan Review of Unnatural Acts etc.* It is published periodically (over 37 issues to date), has a circulation of over 3,000, costs \$1 and is definitely not slick. It is printed by just one man in photo-offset on cheaply coloured paper. It has two types of articles. In the first type, the anonymous editor lists the crimes that straight men commit, sexually, in business and in politics. He sarcastically attacks their machismo and bashes unmercifully at their hypocrisy and violence. They are 'homo but not sexual', professing love for the women they only use as trophies, hiding their fear of homosexuals in hatred of homosexuals.

The second part of the magazine consists of stories from readers who write in and explicitly describe sexual situations that they have been in and enjoyed. It probably can be assumed that some exaggeration does occur in the telling of these stories but it does not seem to matter. The editor continually compares the activities of straight men with these self-reported sexual activities of homosexuals and asks how you can feel *S.T.H.* dirty and sick in comparison to the 'real filth from the straight world'. In an answer to a reader who complains about 'too much politics' in *S.T.H.*, the editor answers that he 'must cater to both those who like to read obscenity (the political news) and to those who like inspiration (the sex news)'.

But how inspiring are the stories? It's difficult to pick out one that is representative, but an example follows:

"INDIANA.

It was a very hot, humid night in northern Indiana. 3.00 A.M. and still 94°. And to top it off I was starving for a load of hot come. While walking the streets in search of some horny stud I came upon Jeff, Reggie, and Terry—'straight' rough trade dudes that I bought grass from once in a while. Reggie asked me if I'd like to take a ride with them and try some of his new pot. I hopped in the car and noticed that they are only wearing swimming suits....

By the time we got to the beach I was so high on pot and horny from being with the guys that I was slobbering. We went to a clearing. One of the guys told me to get down on my knees. Terry looked at the other two and said, 'Hey man I gotta take a piss but there's no toilet around. I'd sure hate to get this pretty sand all wet with my nasty piss.' Jeff said, 'Man here's our fuckin' toilet right here.'"

Is this liberating? It has been claimed that it offends and therefore threatens bourgeois morality because it redefines 'sickness' and calls on us to celebrate sexual behaviour as a mutual exploration of pleasure in the human body without reference to marriage, property or 'social normality'. I question the strength of this claim because it ignores the question of what makes these types of sexual fantasies exciting and, more importantly, it doesn't ask whether we should be challenging or attempting to change these fantasies.

But we can learn something about the nature of our fantasies by looking at the contradictions that are blatantly evident in *S.T.H.* itself. Most of the stories are written by gay

men, but a large majority describe well-liked sexual experiences with the same straight men that the editor castigates in the rest of the magazine—the 'straight rough trade dudes'; the sweaty hardhats on the construction site; the nice, humpy married Italian guy from down the street; the East End Teddy Boys. This is a dilemma that clearly confronts us as gay, male, middle class socialists. We hate macho behaviour and all its manifestations but like it as far as sex or at least sexual fantasy is concerned. *S.T.H.* is significantly sub-titled 'Love and Hate for the American Straight'.

The class element of the stories cannot be ignored where middle class men are still fantasizing about working class straight lads. Why? Andrew Dvoisin gives his explanation in a *Gay Sunshine* article when he says that 'each one wants what the other has: faggot class and cultural superiority on the one side; on the other, straight macho supremacy'. What possible links with feminism and socialism could this attitude have?

So, although it vaguely links sex and politics, *S.T.H.* does not have a vision of what structural changes are necessary to bring about a society that does *not* have an ideology that is anti-homosexual, anti-women and anti-children. Do readers even begin to see that sex has something to do with politics? *S.T.H.* is, as yet, crude propaganda for sexual tolerance and awareness but it takes us nowhere in our struggle against sexism and for socialism.

S.T.H., though, cannot be dismissed because it does show us clearly what many gay men's sexual fantasies are and these cannot be wished away. We may abhor them rationally but they continue to exist. Also, its importance, although not primarily ideological, is structural as it has set up a production and distribution system quite independent of commercial interests. This advance is not at all unimportant.

Objectification and the Socialist Morality

Sexual objectification is a concept and a reality that has come up very often in this article and is continually being discussed in feminist and gay men's groups. In this final section. I want to examine it in more detail because it raises broader issues beyond pornography about a socialist morality and how men and men and women and women should form relationships with each other.

As I have said, one of the strongest arguments against porn is the feminists' claim that it objectifies and therefore exploits women. It encourages men to think of women only as bodies and not as whole individuals. The gay subculture also stands continually accused of encouraging sexual objectification by putting stress on physical appearance and not on 'getting to know people as people'.

Inherent in the argument when presented as above is, I believe, a moral implication about the way in which women and men should relate to each other; that is, as whole or complete individuals: their personalities, ambitions, thoughts, beliefs, etc. must be known before they can see each other as possible sex partners. Sex only belongs within a relationship built on a strong emotional base where people see each other as equal individuals.

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To me, this argument has two implications.

Firstly, it seems too close to the absolutist notion of sex that the conservatives have where they say that sex is only allowed within the context of marriage and that any form of sexuality outside of that framework is perverted or criminal or sad: somehow degrading of 'the real thing'.

It can also become a denial of the erotic, an eroticism that, despite its problems, has only just been allowed to surface ever so slightly over the last 20 years. It denies that sex can be a number of different things and used in a variety of ways all of which have the potential of being non-exploitative and mutually enjoyable if there is an understanding of the meaning of the sex act to those who are involved. This means that sex can vary from a brief encounter initiated by an erotic interest in each other's physical selves all the way to sex being used as the basis of a long-term monogamous relationship.

It is clear that this is much easier for a gay man to say and women, who have been treated exclusively and dishonestly as sex objects, may find it difficult to understand the open and prominent place that sex, especially casual sex, plays in many gay men's lives. Carl Wittman in *A Gay Manifesto* attempts to explain what sex means to us. 'Sex is precisely what we are not supposed to have with each other. And to learn how to be open and good with each other sexually is part of our liberation ... Objectification of sex for us is something we choose to do among us, while for women it is imposed by their oppressors.'

A second implication of the argument is that objectification is *inherently* 'bad' or 'wrong'. But in our highly specialised society, we objectify people all the time. When we purchase goods, we make the sales clerk into an object to satisfy our needs. Marx did not refer to objectification as inherently bad but generally as man's natural means of projecting himself through his productive activity into nature; the production of the worker. But in wage-labour (that is, labour in the capitalist mode of production), 'the object that labour produces, its product, confronts it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer.' The worker has no control over the created object because of the nature of the capitalist relations of production.

Can we in the same way see sexual objectification as not inherently bad in itself? Instead the problem could be seen as resting in the *power* that men have been given over women and the way in which that power is used in the daily contacts and relationships between men and women institutionalised as sexism in the structures of society. So, what is objectionable is not objectification itself but the power that exists in one person (the male) to determine the nature of the sexual and emotional relationship and retain control over it: in the family (husband/wife); in the advertising business (adman/nude women used to sell products); on the streets where men feel justified in whistling at women or even in raping them.

This view of objectification is summarised by Carl Wittman when he says that the use of human bodies as sex objects is legitimate (not harmful) only when it is reciprocal. Objectification to work must be open and frank. People are sexual objects, but they are also subjects, and are human beings who appreciate themselves as object and subject.

What is reflected in pornography is the *unequal* distribution of men's power over women. Porn is a symptom and a reflection of a sexist society characterised by its anti-women bias and violence. This has to be the target of the attack, not the emphasis in some porn on the potential for joy in sexuality.

Good Looks

But this view of objectification, while admitting the power differential between men and women, ignores another form of power that enters into relationships with regards to differential physical attractiveness. Human beings in the sexual market place are evaluated according to their 'exchange value' in the market, some being systematically denied opportunities for sexual behaviour because of the unequal distribution of the socially defined marketable

capacities. So even the 'honest' objectification as put forward by Wittman may be seen as alienating because some may not even get the opportunity to objectify someone else even if it were to be on an equal basis.

A second criticism of Wittman's approach is that it has the inherent assumption that both male and female sexuality inherently needs an object. As Freud says, there is a need for a detached object 'from whom sexual attraction proceeds' (p.45). This assumption ignores the argument that since men and women are socialised differently with respect to gender expectations, then there is the possibility that it is only men who need objects and that women may not *need* objects to get sexually excited. If this is true it might explain women's objection to being used as an object when they, in return, do not receive any pleasure from a similar objectification of men. Evidence pointing to this might be given by the example whereby seeing more and more of the bodies of naked women in men's porn mags was considered to be better and more exciting whereas women seem to have less need to see men copulating or with erections and may in fact be able to achieve sexual satisfaction without reference to an outside object or even an image. Kinsey reports that a majority of males (77%) were 'aroused' by visual depiction of explicit sex while a majority of females (68%) were not aroused. Further, 'females more often than males reported "disgust" and "offence".' (p.394 Brownmiller)

Objectification then, as a concept, needs further clarification and explication before moral conclusions can be drawn. There needs to be continuing debate about the positive and negative aspects of objectification in porn specifically and in relationships generally.

At the present time in this society, a struggle is going on over pornography on two levels. The first is within capitalism itself where porn is consistent yet contradictory with dominant values. As a commodity, it has exchange value—that is, surplus value can be extracted from its production. But it also has a use value for its consumers that is contrary to some aspects of ruling class ideology with respect to sexual behaviour.

Secondly, there is a struggle going on in our lives as socialists who may find certain aspects of porn exciting despite the fact that the images are sexist and involve exploitation that may carry over into the 'real world'. The question remains, can we retain the erotic elements of sexual images and eliminate the sexist and exploitative elements? Can we wrench porn from its ideological moorings? Can we turn porn into art: that is, something that is utopian, ideal and therefore anti-status quo? These are the questions that must be tackled in our continuing struggle to integrate our political theory and practice into our personal lives: an evolution of a socialist morality.

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This article ends with many questions and very few answers. The issues of socialism, morality and objectification are just beginning to be aired. More work must be done. In the formulation of these questions, I want to thank Andrew Hodges, John Marshall, Frank Pearce, Ken Plummer, Steve Smith and the Gay Left collective for their assistance. Ideas from written sources are credited at the end of the article.

Working Class Lesbians

by Kay Young,

In writing this article I don't know whether to describe myself as a working class lesbian or not. Although I come from a working class home I have had a middle class education but I suppose a black lesbian with a middle class education wouldn't and couldn't deny her blackness so I don't and won't my working class roots.

Being a lesbian and working class is very confusing. Firstly your sexuality is one of the main bases of working class humour alongside blacks and "poufs" and your status in the working class is that of a woman, not a very desirable situation to be in. Many working class lesbians see their primary and only oppression coming from their being lesbians, many are not aware of their oppression as women because to a certain extent working class lesbians accept the cultural norm - they do not see any way in which they could be making a political statement through their sexuality.

An everyday working class lesbian in the North-East of England, from where most of my experience is drawn, usually works in a factory or an office (e.g. rather like her straight working class sister). The majority of women work in all-female factories and offices and feel it safer to keep quiet about their lesbianism because, although anti-gayness doesn't seem to be very strong or explicit, there would be a hard core of misunderstanding and ignorance. This might make it difficult for a lesbian to work with the other women. Also lesbians have to hang on to their jobs for obvious economic reasons and as the work is usually hard and boring anyway it is important to keep the work relationships as easy and happy as possible. So she can either state her sexuality which means the other women accept her superficially but feel guarded about what to say or how to act in her presence, or deny her sexuality, keep in the closet at work while socially she and her lover hang round with two gay men and pretend to be straight. That is drinking in Workingmen's Clubs with gay men so that workmates can see that they have blokes so must be straight. From the workingmen's club the foursome usually go on to a gay club/pub and get on with being lesbians or gay men.

But even in the gay club/pub the working class lesbian still has to crack down to gay male culture. A working class lesbian's only source of contact and the only way she can socialise with other lesbians is through male dominated clubs/pubs. The overwhelming presence of gay men and the power which they hold within these social areas becomes oppressive. In the North East there exist three gay clubs and about eight bars -not much choice for an area of this size. In Newcastle for example there are two pubs and one club and a normal evening will consist of a drink in the pub and then on to the club, something which begins to pall after five years of doing the same thing every Friday and Saturday.

To a great extent the working class lesbian accepts and indulges in the worst aspects of gay male culture and heterosexual working class attitudes. For example because a working class lesbian is constantly bombarded in her workplace and family with rigid heterosexuality she feels the only way of making her lesbianism acceptable is to fit lesbianism into role playing etc. No relief or other answer is given in gay club/pub culture where sexism and materialism are rampant. When I first went into a gay club, I totally accepted the fact that I had to be well dressed and quite trendy and went through more insecurities about my physical shortcomings than I ever did when I was heterosexual. The only other acceptable alternative would be for me to be extremely butch, wear 3-piece suits, have short hair, ties, pint glass and a swagger. The two values, as directed by gay male culture and heterosexuality are obvious here: if you want to be part of the male dominated gay scene be hip and trendy; if you want to take on heterosexual stereotyping of lesbians be extremely butch or femme. To me there was no other way so I became hip and trendy and just a trifle butch.

Because, generally speaking, the working class has such rigid divisions of the sex roles it is easy to understand why working class lesbians fall more easily into butch/femme

relationships. Although younger lesbians feel that the butch, femme roles are not so important as they used to be for the older women there is still evidence of its presence. Some feel that it is easier to survive as lesbians within the working class if they take on easily-identifiable heterosexual roles so that heterosexuals can identify with them and accept them to some extent. For most working class lesbians, women's liberation/feminism is something very unreal and they are very wary of it and who wouldn't be. In most cases they have never analysed their lesbianism from a feminist point of view but have instead explained it in terms given by this male dominated society "I was born like this" or "I'm queer and that's it!" To working class lesbians most feminists appear posh talking, upper class women who eat funny "rabbit food", dress "scruffy" deliberately, and call their kids Benjamin or Jane. They feel totally unable to relate to these women and relate more to a working class man than a middle class feminist. This sounds like a juicy bit of propaganda for oppression lying only in class but this is not so. Women find it so fucking hard to relate to each other in their own class. how can you expect them to hit it off a treat with women from a different class. Middle class lesbians, through feminism, have found some form of unity and culture, but working class lesbians have not. They have not the same facility, education, or values as the middle class. How can working class lesbians find common ground with each other when they exist in a class which totally oppresses them as opposed to the liberal values of the middle class. I believe that until working class lesbians somehow get together with themselves and other working class women, there will never be a working communication with middle class lesbian women because the cultural differences are so strong.

Most working class lesbians I have spoken to say they feel totally put down and patronised by middle class lesbians. This is directly caused by power relationships due to the differing class values. It is hard for a middle class woman not to dominate or monopolise a meeting, group or relationships where working class women are involved. Alternatively it is very difficult for a working class woman to feel confident etc. where middle class women are involved.

In my experience as a feminist I feel solidarity with my middle class sisters as a lesbian, but as a working class woman I feel separated and intimidated. I do not feel that I am attacking middle-class women/lesbians but I am trying to tell my sisters that there is a class difference which will have to be overcome before we can unite. For example, I was at a meeting on rape. The majority of women were middle class lesbians and there were a few women from the local Women's Aid Refuge. The middle class women did not want to talk down to the women from the Refuge and so did not try to explain the things they were saying which made it worse for the refuge women who felt in turn that they could not ask. At one point somebody suggested to try to think of ideas to get the recognition from judges etc. of the brutality of rape. Immediately a refuge woman said she would go out and get raped and make a showcase trial. The middle class women went silent with shock. Instead of explaining why she should not get deliberately raped they said nothing. They were not going to reprimand her in case they intimidated her but they, in fact put her down by treating her almost as a child who makes an innocent/provocative remark and is ignored on the basis of their naivety. So it seems like a vicious circle of misunderstanding through class and cultural power structures.

Working class lesbians and middle class lesbians must contribute equally their values to each other, not the middle class lesbian saying how one must dress, eat, smoke, and enlighten one's consciousness. There must be a fair exchange of relevant values between the two before lesbians as lesbians not middle class or working class can really start doing things together. We are not all women together because we live in a class society. We are, though, definitely all women oppressed together and it is from this oppression which we must fight that our unity as a classless women's movement will come.

Clienting

INDIVIDUAL SOLUTIONS TO COLLECTIVE PROBLEMS

by Derek Cohen

Every lesbian and gay man, practically, starts her/his life in isolation. Most of us developed our (homo)sexual awareness in a situation where we, ourselves, were the only gay person we knew. In my teens I was fascinated by some of the other boys at school. It started out as a jealousy of their "attractiveness" rather than an actual attraction, and there was certainly little sexual about that attraction. Nonetheless most of my sexual phantasies were about men. My only contact with other gay men was through the media—camp queens on television, documentaries featuring anonymous "unhappy" homosexuals interviewed in shadow. Homosexual men were rarely shown positively and never as a movement or expressing collective strength. Though often portrayed in a better light now, we are still shown largely as individuals. Gay women were not shown at all. On the basis of my isolation and the isolated lives homosexuals were presented as having, I saw my own homosexual feelings as some sinister base part of my individual nature that I had to exorcise in order to be "normal". This is a very common experience yet I, like very many gay people, thought I was one of very few. I felt I "shared" my feelings only in the sense that patients in a doctor's waiting room share their suffering. I never knowingly met any other gay people until I was about 19 or 20. I saw my homosexual feelings as an individual problem, as something that was wrong with *me*, and as fault of my personality. I now see that being "a homosexual" is more than a personal characteristic. It is the result of an attempt to polarise human sexuality into two clearly separate (and mutually exclusive) areas, only one of which is deemed "normal".

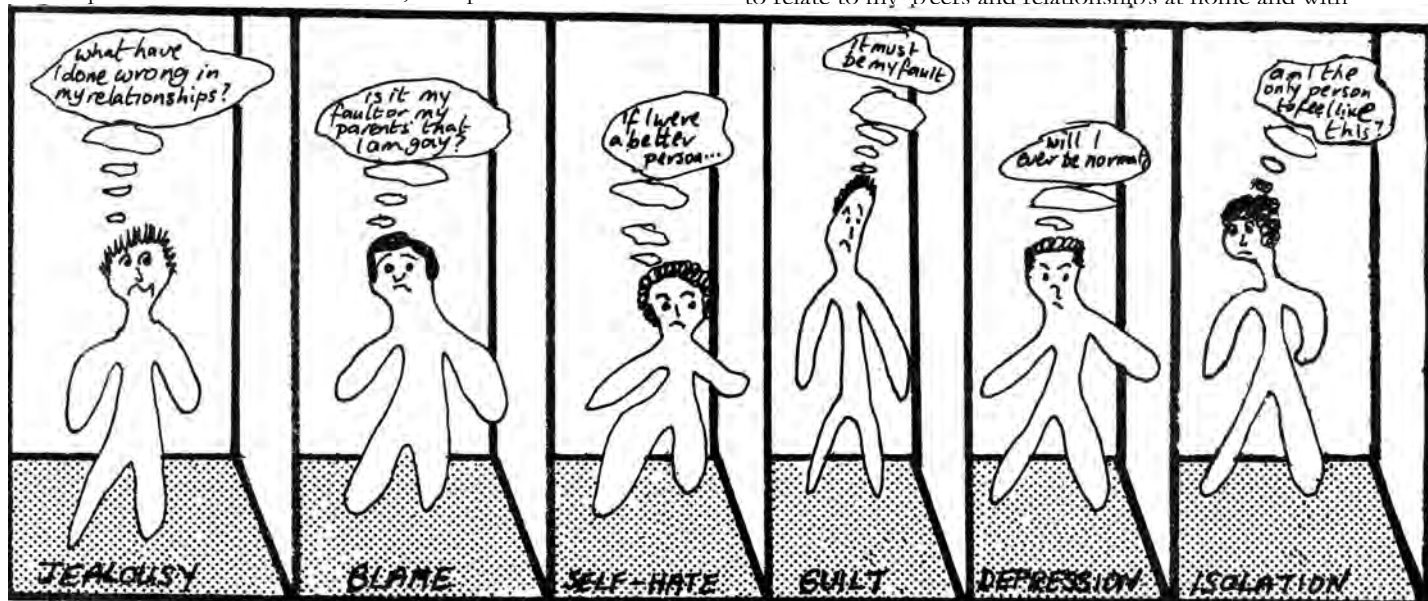
I am going to use the term clienting to denote the process whereby members of disadvantaged or oppressed groups come to accept the conflicts and tensions of being a minority group as individual personal internal problems rather than collective experiences. The term "clienting" is derived from social work and other "helping" professions where people experiencing certain problems are treated as clients, objects to be "helped", "treated" and dealt with so as to bring them as individuals back into line with the rest of the world. Clienting is when I come to think homosexuality is *my problem* rather than seeing the unhappiness as the consequence of certain prejudices, role expectations and dynamics between *groups* of people. The conflicts between my own desire to explore the potential of my sexual attractions and the limited (heterosexual) role expectations of being a man are experienced not as role conflicts, as experiences common

to a group (and usually this is an other-defined group), not as something with a root outside myself, but as personal problems to be overcome by individual effort, personal growth, personal treatment. The experiences "cliented" individuals often have depression, low self esteem, a desire to "get better and be normal", a jealousy of the majority group's values and attributes.

Our History

There are any number of processes that lead us, in different parts of our lives, to take an individualistic, cliented view of ourselves, both in terms of our inner emotions and personality, and terms of our external relationships. Generally we see our inner worlds as being the essence of our individuality—if all else I know what I feel and what I think. Emotions are somehow meant to be more "real", somehow underneath our skin and bone there is meant to be something different—more fundamental and lasting—when in fact there is just more blood and guts. Beneath the layers of conflict and turbulent emotion is, supposedly, and essential "natural" state of being—yet there are merely different sets of socially constructed feelings and attitudes. Childhood innocence and "spontaneous natural ways of being" are as socially created and culturally specific as adult roles and adult conflicts, as that magical state of flux termed adolescence. In contrast by looking at our relationships with other people, whether at work, in the family, in sex or whatever, collectively we can see our inner worlds as shared experiences—social entities rather than individual personal private items, and usually problematic ones at that. If I discover that my experiences, whether of early self hatred and distancing from my homosexuality, or of finding that such things as sexual satisfaction and the making of satisfactory non-exploitative relationships are really difficult, what becomes of my individual "pathology"? The common experiences that *are* propagated are of heterosexuality, happy family life and an ambitious self generated road from birth to success. We do not easily perceive the complement of this—an excluded non-heterosexual preference—as being a shared experience in the same way.

It isn't hard for me to see why I developed this way of seeing myself. From an early age I learned to relate primarily on hierarchical lines. There was little emphasis on relating "horizontally" on a peer basis. My first relationships were with my parents and my relationships with my sister and other children were given a lower priority. At my primary, and later, grammar schools I competed or was put in a competitive situation with other children for teachers' attention, status positions, marks. How rarely were we taught to solve problems collectively! I was never encouraged to take notes on what other children said as opposed to what the teacher or the books said. The whole concept of learning from other "learners" was rarely stressed and is often put down as cheating. Feeling different from other children, though as yet without any clear reason, it was even harder to relate to my peers and relationships at home and with





teachers became even more important. Once I started work I had great difficulty relating with fellow workers except on a competitive individual basis. This competitive atmosphere reinforced and was reinforced by both a hierarchical structure and an individualised privatised client view of myself. I failed to work collectively with ease at first; it took a positive change for me to see what I had in common with other workers, to recognise how our roles are externally defined. These processes pervaded not only work, but my living situations, my close relationships, and my politics.

Declienting: Forging The Links

The consequences of my inability to see myself, for us to see ourselves, not as "individual homosexuals" but as members of an "other-defined" group sharing a common disapproved and supposedly minority sexual preference is a failure to recognise and utilise the potential of our collective strength. In sections of the amorphous huddle that is the gay movement there are groups of lesbians and gay men that meet and try to make use of their shared experiences.

Recognising the potential of collective strength is the first step in declienting. My first experience of declienting was at a CHE conference. I went as an individual homosexual—tentatively trying to come to terms with and accept my homosexual feelings. I came away *Gay*—a part of wider identity; not something I *could* share but something I blatantly *did* have in common with very many other people independently of my will.

My early relationships with gay men showed me that my insecurity about my homosexuality, my fears about and ignorance of gay sex, the tentative way in which I felt able to come out in different parts of my life, all were shared experiences. I am not idealising my experiences—but by sharing them through the medium of this article I increase the possibility of myself and other people recognising their very "usual" nature.

In *Gay Left* meetings when we have talked about our experiences, whether past or present, I have been surprised and felt greatly assured by their similarity to my own. These benefits were not directly my motives for joining a group—I joined to end my isolation—yet the benefits are far beyond what I could hope to achieve alone.

In seeking to form new relationships or develop existing ones I find myself with limited options. I can find someone to "settle down with"; I can attempt to cruise the bars and discos; I can attend the social milieu of CHE groups; I can remain alone and isolated. On my own I can possibly increase my ability to make use of these particular types of choices. I can persevere longer in sustaining central relationships; I can gain more confidence at approaching strange men; I can become a better mixer in social groups; I can cope better with loneliness. I may gain some benefits from these situations but increasing my options is something that I know I cannot in any way do on my own. I cannot, on my own, create new settings for contact with other people and

develop new forms of relationships, because those possibilities aren't created by my own act of will, but by a continuing creative collective process.

At a meeting held as part of the recent Gay Times Festival held in London a majority of the men expressed the need to be part of a group; for the feeling of togetherness and solidarity experienced at the Festival to continue. They had, in various groups, experienced new ways of relating that they wished to develop. On their own, outside the Festival, they would not have been able to create these opportunities, but working within a group of other gay men made a creative process possible.

I do not, though, want to give the impression that just by meeting in groups we will necessarily develop greater options or become more aware, or in achieving these things find the going in any way easy and straight forward. Declienting ourselves means not just sharing experiences but using those insights to take action in our lives; to confront the group pressures around us. Collective strength has enabled us to walk, arm in arm, kissing and cuddling down Oxford Street on a march; to join pickets at Grunwicks; to establish a gay presence in many political settings. But it could easily lead us to give better coffee mornings, perhaps set up more comfortable cruising areas and no more. Men's groups (whether gay or non-gay or mixed) are particularly problematic because they can so easily find themselves providing group support to bolster male chauvinistic attitudes that are under attack. We should be able to use collective strength, a collective identity, to move out of rigid ways of relating rather than to reinforce them.

Further dangers arise as self-defined groups get stronger. Gay men can become more out of touch with lesbians and other women, with racial minorities, with other classes, with other age groups. I could extend my methods of relating with other gay men and retain sexist racist ageist and class prejudices. These attitudes would inevitably produce limitations, and many gay groups have owed their demise or disruption to conflicts over these issues.

Ghosts

Even allowing for these reservations change does not come easily. Recognising socially structured emotions and the way we are presented with limited options for development we try to behave differently. Yet the past lingers on. How often do the relationships we had with our parents, or we saw the them having with each other, reappear in other guises in different parts of our lives? It remains incredibly difficult to hold on to new options. I often find myself in situations eerily similar to past ones. I am tempted to say "how do I set these things up? What am I doing that is an old habit?" But I must resist. I am *not* the only person to experience these conflicts. I know I share these experiences with others. The resolution lies not *in* me, not even between myself and my friends, but in a wider context. I spent six years as a social worker treating other people as "clients". I have stopped clienting other people. I must stop clienting myself. Correction, We must stop clienting ourselves and each other. We have collective problems and must not seek individual solutions.

Gays At Work - Boxed In

by John Quinn

The main practical emphasis of the Gay Movement has tended to be with alternative ways of living, construction of relationships and social facilities. The workplace has not been an area of major intervention. For while the gay worker's experience of exploitation and alienation is not fundamentally different from that of any other worker, the gay oppression which she/he experiences created a different perception of events from that of the stereotyped worker who is white, male and heterosexual.

Most gays still endure the sexist language of the workplace whether that is concerned with "knockers" or "engagement rings", and allow their identities to be ignored and oppressed

Having met a member of *Gay Left* at the filming of *Night-bawks*, we fell into discussion in one of the long waits between scenes. It arose that some of us felt that gay socialists intellectualise the problems and aspirations of the left overmuch, causing a detachment from the more working class members of the gay community. The chances of a left-wing movement of this nature, be it straight or gay, influencing the general body of union and non-union workers in industry is slim. Having said this, I was asked to put my pen where my mouth was, so to speak; that is to write a non-intellectual account of being gay in a very working class environment, i.e. a paper and container factory.

My job is the printing of containers and boxes, my function is that of Machine Manager. This is considered a skilled job, although the nature of the work does not demand much of my actual skill. I served an apprenticeship in a very small jobbing printers. Throughout this period of apprenticeship I was not overtly gay in any way in my private life or at work, although I always knew from an early age where my sexuality was at. Consequently I was very frightened and confused throughout this time.

Being in a very working class environment, reactions to one's sexuality are very strong, they call a spade a spade, or a poof a poof. This may be a very strong reaction but at least you know where you stand. Of course the common view still held is that all male homosexuals are effeminate and practise buggery, although of late they seem to have caught onto the idea of fellatio. Concerning lesbians they usually assume they all use enormous dildos and are only indulging in lesbianism because they can't find a man. Not necessarily an attractive man, just any man. Although this rather belies the image given to them in various pornographic magazines liberally scattered around the firm, wherein the two women indulging in the act of sexual intercourse are both nubile and the heterosexual man's ideal. Of course these women are not considered to be really lesbians but just indulging in a little light relief until the big 'fuck' comes along. As you can imagine from this their sexual awareness is not very great. Being presented with such blanket prejudice the obvious course of action would be for me to refute it; alas here I feel I am sadly lacking, usually falling into a safe non-committal stance. One of the few times I made a stand I revealed my gayness to one of my work-mates. This all started from a CHE programme on the television the previous evening, and one particular person's objections to it. His main reaction was disgust about the outward show of affection between men taking part although he seemed quite ready to accept the women doing the same. I suggested that he was disgusted by it because he equated affection between men as weakness and unmasculine behaviour. Another work-mate agreed with me and since I was so surprised at a supportive voice I confided in this person about my gayness. From that moment on he showed great interest and much sympathy about my being gay. I obviously raised his consciousness since he has now left the firm, also leaving his wife and child, to live with another man. Before doing this he revealed his growing awareness of his homosexuality.

Although I rarely admit my gayness at work I have never made a secret of the fact that I live with a man or for that.

by the verbal pre-occupations of their workmates, and the sexism of their bosses.

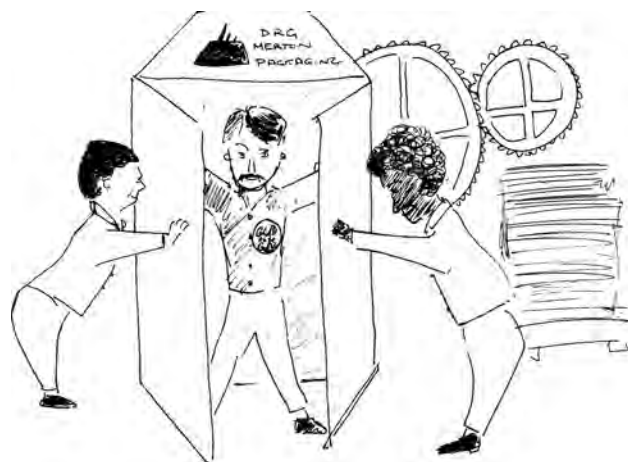
This series, Gays at Work, is an attempt to examine some of these problems. We hope that the experiences of the people who write for us will be of use both to our individual readers and the gay movement in its attempt to develop a strategy for tackling gayness at work. Contributions will be welcomed. We do not expect them to be in the vein of 'How I came out at work and still became General Secretary of the AUMGMW'. We will, however, welcome pieces which honestly discuss people's attempts to cope and struggle with the problem of gayness at work.

matter that I share the same bedroom. Also I have never made up false women friends for the benefit of their curiosity.

An interesting aspect of my work is the high percentage of black people in the factory, the vast majority being West Indian. When I arrived at the firm my experience of multi-racial environments was very limited, having served my apprenticeship in a new town where there are no coloured immigrants at all. I think my being gay gives me an empathy with them as a minority group and also I hope gives me a more open attitude to accepting them on their own terms. The most common prejudice towards them at work stems from people expecting them to react to situations as if they came from a European cultural background. The West Indian attitude to gay people is strange in that they seem to think of gayness as a complaint peculiar only to white people. They also find it slightly amusing but no threat to their excessive outward display of masculinity. This attitude coincides with their attitude towards women which seems positively feudal at times. Lately they seem to be realising the truth about me with their references to 'batti-batti-man' (bum-man) and my 'friend' Dennis.

The white workforce are more vocal and aware of gay people, they seem far less secure of their sexuality. As a result they camp around far more, acting out their preconceived notions of what gay people are like. Larry Grayson and the like have a lot to answer for on that score. The fact that I do not conform to their stereotype confuses and worries them, making them suspicious of my life style, but dismissing my being gay, since I look and behave for the most part like them.

Another aspect of working on the factory floor is the amount of bodily contact encountered, the need to touch one another seems to be extremely strong. An assumption one could draw from this is that they are relieving their latent homosexual urges. It would seem my arse is touched more at work than it is at home. Most of this contact is done on a very subconscious basis, and most of them would be very



affronted if you suggested it had any sexual connotation. Their whole range of 'butch' mannerisms are at times as affected as the most outrageous camp 'queen'. It is hard to know how many of them feel about women as they rarely drop their 'macho' front on this score. Surely they must have other attitudes than sexual ones towards them. Women are very rarely talked about as personalities in the all-male shop floor environment. I get the impression that many of them never actually talk to women at great length. The women who actually work in the factory are reduced to doing boring, menial labour and are given no incentive to improve their lot.

The political stance of most people in the factory seems to be apathetic or at best on an immediate and personal level; if anything they veer more to the right than to the left. This could be put down to a lack of information and reading the *Sun* newspaper, which seems to amount to the same thing.

Their belief in everything the popular press writes as gospel never ceases to amaze me.

When asked to write this article it annoyed and saddened me to know that I'm still in my closet at work, it seemed to be the last hurdle in my coming out. Having said this, explaining my gayness to people so outwardly hostile to the idea frightens me. A martyr eight hours a day is something I cannot manage just now but perhaps one day. If this article sounds like a total put-down of the working classes it isn't intended. I realise that most of the people cannot be bothered or even find the energy to worry overmuch about minorities, sub-cultures etc, which do not strongly affect them. After working long hours in a noisy, dirty, boring and relatively poorly paid job their main pursuit outside seems to be to escape from the constraints of their working life. To accuse them of playing games is, on my part, rather hypocritical as I am playing a bigger game in not admitting my gayness.

A Cure for Psychiatry?

by Chris Jones

In our last issue we suggested the potential importance of recent developments of Freudian theory for an understanding of sexual differences and oppression. This article approaches the question from a slightly different position by examining the limitations of current psychiatric practice as well as the relevance for us now of Freudian concepts. We must neither ignore nor be totally deterred by the development of psychiatric practice since Freud in appraising his importance.

"Healthiness is a purely conventional concept and has no real scientific meaning. It simply means that a person gets on well; it does not mean that person is particularly worthy. (Freud uses the word 'wertsvoll'). There are 'healthy' people who are not worth anything, and on the other hand there are 'unhealthy' neurotic people who are very worthy individuals indeed."

These words of Freud stand in marked contrast to the practice of psychiatry today. Psychiatry deals in terms of 'normality', 'abnormality', 'illness' and 'cure'. This article is concerned with showing how the therapeutic judgement and treatment helps to maintain, and indeed form, an oppressive ideological superstructure, by ensuring that the dominant ideology is successfully 'consumed' and internalised by us all, and in the face of this practice, to see what credence we can lend attempts to regard psychoanalytic theory as affording a revolutionary analysis of ideology and sexuality (attempts which at present are becoming fashionable in certain theoretical Marxist circles).

Bourgeois Psychiatric Practice

Bourgeois psychiatry (and psychology) takes the individual as its unit of study and meaning (variously described as the mind, mental processes, or behaviour). A strict dichotomy is established between inner and outer, public and private, society and the individual. The lack of an individual's power over social reality and the meaning the individual gives to this situation is converted into the language of unconscious motives. The social order is reduced to a projection of a more real world of inner psychic conflicts. The unconscious is seen as separable from the social situation. The individual's activity can thus be examined apart from the social relations, of which he/she is a part. Yet psychiatrists cannot be neutral when working within a mesh of power-structured relationships. The professional psychiatrist, enhanced by social and 'scientific' status along with technological advances, is faced by the amateur patient/client, who is forced to rely on the psychiatrist's wisdom. The psychiatrist produces treatment which the patient/client consumes. The Marxist suspicion of the expert can combine with the feminist attack on a male authority figure (it is generally irrelevant whether the psychiatrist is actually a man or a woman) in order to focus criticism on this unequal active/passive relationship. Any far-

reaching attempt to democratise the National Health Service, the relationship between treater and treated, treater and treater, is inevitably thwarted by the structure itself, which is a vast monolith of hierarchies within hierarchies.

It is in their roles as deceivers (though of course it may often be necessary that psychiatrists do not see themselves as such) that Donato Mancini Francescato, an Italian psychiatrist, has this to say:

"Psychiatrists (along with sociologists, psychologists and social workers) have become the new administrators of the violence of the power structure. In the measure that they soothe conflicts, break down resistance and 'solve' the problems created, they perpetuate the global violence by convincing the individual to accommodate to the oppressive conditions."

The process is simple. The psychiatrist gives an opinion that someone is ill. This judgement becomes fact, in Marxist terms a material condition, and once classified as mentally ill, the person loses his/her subject-status and freedom (albeit a limited freedom). Any attempt by the amateur patient/client to claim otherwise is simply treated as resistance (here used as a term of psychiatric jargon) and a further symptom of the illness itself.

The Ideology of Normality

The terms of 'adjustment' or 'treatment' are those of normal behaviour, which are not measured by any neutral medical standard (unless an illness is *clearly* organically caused, in which case physical treatment is required) but by psycho, social, legal and ethical standards mystified as medical diagnosis and prognosis, that is definition and treatment. Therapy inevitably deals with conflicting goals and values, and plainly the distinction between normal (Moral) behaviour and abnormal (emotionally disordered) behaviour rests on ethical and moral judgement. It is in this manner that psychiatry promotes the primary values of the community. In Marxist terms, psychiatric treatment carries with it a cultural/ideological significance. Thus the effectiveness of treatment is measured by standards of performance at work/school/sex etc.—we get better by performing better (by making the grade)—we feel better (we feel placated)—we seek employment (we are being worthwhile)—we are getting/staying married or leaving a 'bad' marriage in order to enter a 'good' one (we are being normal). The psychiatric ideology is simplified for consumption by the masses, endorsed by legislators, courts, churches etc. In the words of Thomas Szasz, 'sort of general ruling consensus as plain commonsense' is established.

Homosexuality offends this web of 'commonsense'. The psychiatrist often bases his/her judgement on early familial relationships—to put it baldly, good family structures produce 'normal' healthy people—faulty family structures pro-

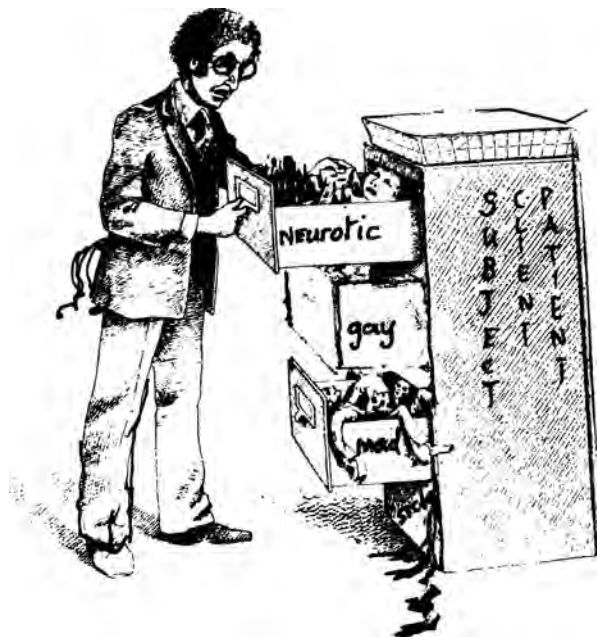
duce 'abnormal' neurotics. Homosexuals are frequently defined as *necessarily* neurotic, and cases of *personality disorder*. In this context the psychiatrist can explain away homosexual relationships as inferior versions of their heterosexual counterparts. The man may only *play* wife, the other, husband. The butch lesbian only pretends at 'real' masculinity. The femme role is only a charade of 'true' femininity, and of course many homosexuals do conduct themselves in this manner, because it is the only structure of relationships they have learnt, and of which they can conceive, thus providing observation fodder for the psychiatrist.

The only real sign of health and normality is taken to be the homosexual's desire not to be homosexual, not to exist as the person he or she is. The conflicts of the gay in the straight world have been well documented in many books and articles, but the psychiatrist is inclined to disregard social context, and reduces the problems a homosexual experiences to her/his own condition, as a maladjusted/abnormal/deviant/immature/neurotic etc. person. The psychiatrist when faced with a homosexual who believes herself/himself to be ill, far from eradicating the internalised feelings of self-hate, inadequacy, guilt, respects the person's wish for 'treatment' and oils the chains that bind a homosexual so that he or she can move more comfortably, but *on no account* more freely. The permeation of psychiatric ideology is extraordinarily deep, and the problems for the gay in terms of resolving emotional problems and ridding him/her self of the label 'unhealthy' are vast.

Power Relations in Therapy

The psychotherapist Karl Jaspers had no illusions about the functions of the therapist. He said

"All therapy, psychotherapy and attitudes to patients depend upon the State, religion, social conditions and dominant cultural tendencies of the age and finally but never solely on accepted scientific views . . ."



And we must remember that psychiatry is broadly defined as the science and practice of treating mental and emotional behavioural disorders, and especially as originating in endogenous causes or resulting from faulty interpersonal relationships. Psychiatrists are cast and cast themselves in the role of 'scientific experts' on personal relations. The key concept of mental health (normality) and sickness (abnormality) are used as their own justification so that the psychiatrist elevated into such a prestigious position may use his/her power to discredit different forms of social challenge.

Plainly the ability to respond to this pressure, depends on how articulate one is, how much influence one has as an individual and as a member of a class, and how much money and time one has at one's disposal. Relatively speaking, there is a world of difference in the amount of control one has over the therapeutic process, between the patient on the

Harley Street couch and the patient in the NHS clinic or hospital; the standard of treatment one receives on the NHS may well depend on something as circumstantial as where one lives.

Faced with this armoury of ideological weapons, the ramifications and variations of which I have barely touched, one is naturally drawn to the conclusion that in the words of Rick Kunnes, an American radical therapist -- "as long as we are not explicitly conscious of and actively fighting against the therapeutic process, we will remain politically unconscious."

In attempting to gain a clear(er) understanding of sexuality and using this new understanding to form a base from which to attack some of the monstrous distortions of human reality in which psychiatric theory engages, many have elevated conscious choice and social context, so that a more complete explanation of a person's social/sexual existence may be afforded. Marxist materialism is not about the crude effect of matter on brain, but a relationship, or better still the interrelatedness of human consciousness within and to social context. However, traditional bourgeois therapy has focused on the Unconscious at the expense of the process and praxis of the human situation; we are turned from a social context towards one that is intrapsychic. The reaction to this has been a rejection of the Unconscious, as a mystifier of social relations. This of course deals with the problem of the validity and value of all forms of psychotherapy; they simply become rituals in maintaining an illusory nonsense, which only serves to placate and deceive people, maintaining them in 'false consciousness'. This form of attack bears a striking similarity to that made on religion, as an institutionalised form of ideological control. Thus it seems perfectly acceptable to talk of psychiatrists as the 'new priests' of a 'secular religion'.

A New Understanding

Yet a newer and quite remarkable trend is a return to the work of Freud himself and his own concept of 'psychoanalysis' with the claim that if the mistakes and misunderstandings of the past, and the growth of present psychiatric theory and practice, with its emphasis of adoptions and adjustment, were all stripped away, a reinterpretation of his work would offer real hope for a clear analysis of the human situation. All the more remarkable is that some of the strongest support for this claim comes from within the feminist circles which have always been closely associated with the most vehement attacks on Freud.

Obviously at this stage it would be impossible to detail the possibilities this viewpoint raises, let alone talk of its implications for psychotherapeutic practice. However some important points need to be borne in mind if one is going to take this path. It is probably symptomatic of that permeation of psychiatric ideology that I find it hard to dismiss the Unconscious as a viable concept. It is when considering how we carry around certain social relations within us, which cannot be analysed and eradicated by a simple recall to conscious attention, that the notion of the Unconscious becomes a valuable tool in our understanding of how ideology maintains its stronghold over and within people's lives. It is with the possibility of a repression of ideas, ideas with which we as conscious individuals cannot cope, that the complexity of ideological structures can begin to be appreciated, and it is this repression which necessitates the existence of an Unconscious. With this mode of explanation it becomes clearer how people may internalise, and indeed be motivated by, certain 'facts' about themselves, without being aware of them, and quite possibly finding it necessary to deny their very existence.

The Oedipus Complex

Our interest focuses on the question of how this 'Unconscious' may facilitate an understanding of the social relations in which we are engaged. For Freud the contact between the individual and culture is at the time of a resolution, or rather dissolution, of the Oedipus Complex. The Oedipus Complex can crudely be described as that 'structure' of neuroses which develops because of one's incest wishes. (It was with his development of his work on the Oedipus Complex that Freud

found confirmation for his concept of bisexuality). The Oedipus Complex while expressing itself within social relations is not bound to those selfsame relations. In fact real events and people are not necessarily present. Juliet Mitchell describes it in these terms:

"The Oedipus Complex is not a set of *attitudes* to other people, but a pattern of relationships between a set of places actually occupied or otherwise."

That 'pattern of relationships' Freud believed to be a 'universal event'. So in our own specific historical context, the dissolution of this Complex is worked out within the 'nuclear' family. The nature of the culture into which one enters is patriarchal for reasons which are bound up with the nature of the Complex itself. If this Complex is a 'universal event' it now becomes clear as to why all civilisation is synonymous with patriarchal culture. If one desires a change in the nature of 'culture' yet still maintains the importance of this Complex as an explanation for culture, then one is going to look closely at the nature of this 'universality' and the Complex's relation to 'actual social relations', if psychoanalysis is going to be used as anything more than a description of sexual oppression.

Necessary Perspectives

Finally there is a methodological point that must be considered. Your view may well be that psychiatric practice is a total distortion of Freud's own work, indeed flatly contradicts what he had to say, and therefore can legitimately be

seen as distinct from it. Yet one cannot examine the nature of psychiatry's role today without accounting for its historical development, and that must include an honest analysis of Freud's work, particularly his own very specific understanding of the Unconscious, and what links that may have with present-day experience. Speaking of the "gross perversion for primitive or ideological purposes" of psychoanalysis Mitchell says,

"It is another question whether or not there is something within Freud's work that leads to this ideological abuse.

In a sense it is obvious that there must be, but exactly why or what it is, is a complex and interesting subject and whatever it is, it would not, of course, invalidate what surrounds it, though it should be extracted from it and rejected."

That must be the main priority of those who wish to offer us a reappraisal of Freud, for unless that is done, we may be embarking on a course of action the results of which may well be reflection of those 'facts' against which we are presently struggling.

Books referred to in the writing of this article:

Thomas Szasz *The Myth of Mental Illness - Ideology and Insanity*.

Radical Therapist Collective *The Radical Therapist*.

Phil Brown (editor) *Radical Psychology*.

Juliet Mitchell *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*.

Karl Jaspers 'The Nature of Psychotherapy' from his *General Psychology*.

Motherhood

Of Woman Born

by Adrienne Rich

(Virago, Hardback £7.50, paperback £2.50)

Reviewed by Jane Lewis

This is a very powerful and evocative book. Poetic prose was to be expected, but the book is also finely structured and Rich's total belief in, and commitment to, her vision of motherhood provides its strength. Yet somehow it remains a vision and does not withstand detailed analysis. Either you empathise with it or you don't, but if you don't you will in all likelihood still identify strongly with the reconstruction of Rich's own experiences.

Rich believes strongly that 'the personal is political' and regards the most personal chapter in the book (on mother/daughter relationships) as the "core" of her work. This, and the preceding chapter on mothers and sons, are probably the most effective. As the mother of three sons, as a daughter, and as a woman involved emotionally and sexually with other women, she is able to articulate and identify with so many female experiences and she has the ability to relate a particular recorded experience to the wider framework of women's existence. Moving easily among works of history, anthropology, myth and literature, she picks up a letter in Margaret Sanger's *Motherhood in Bondage* to illustrate the impossible contradiction demanded of women by institutionalised motherhood: "to be natural and play the part", or the had relationship between Anna Gordon and Stephen in *The Well of Loneliness* as symptomatic of the taboo put upon women seeking intimacy with women (even with our mothers) after adolescence by a patriarchal system which fears the bonding of women and the power of motherhood.

Early on in the Vietnam war a Frenchwoman asked Rich, the mother of three sons, "Vous travaillez pour l'armee, madame?" The phrase is repeated twice more in the book, as a motif symbolizing the powerlessness to which Rich believes patriarchy has reduced motherhood. Women have no control over either the number of children they shall bear (abortion and contraception laws having been invoked and repealed according to the dictates of perceived population needs over the centuries) or the event of childbirth itself.

Rich sees patriarchy as the factor common to all present day societies and thus as the fundamental determinant of women's oppression. It is not clear how patriarchy is to be defined, how it created "the institution of motherhood", or how exactly this institution operates. We are provided only with a forceful description of the pain and violence suffered by mothers actual and potential in our society (which women have been taught to consider 'natural') and, via an exploration of a little anthropology and a lot of myth, a reconstruction of "pre-patriarchal" motherhood. We have to take the interaction between patriarchy and motherhood on trust. Rich states briefly that the family is the core of patriarchy and institutionalised motherhood and heterosexual relations are essential to its existence, but she does not elaborate.

What exactly our strategy should be in the light of this is unclear. A return to some form of matriarchy is not seriously suggested. The discussion of pre-patriarchal motherhood is rather to fill the need Rich feels for traditions of female power. Nonetheless, Rich feels that we must work to abolish patriarchy because only then will institutionalised motherhood disappear. So, how is it to be done? Rich catalogues very briefly the collective efforts of women in the States to confront some typical situations where gay women are denied custody of children, abortions are hard to obtain and home births unheard of. But it appears that the chief force for change must come from within our own heads. We must rethink.

Rich undoubtedly makes a valid point when she describes the way in which the influence of patriarchal attitudes has warped women's attitudes to their own bodies and their views of childbearing. Many women, for example, do feel distaste and revulsion at the early mother-goddess figures which emphasize breast and belly. The childless woman does often congratulate herself on her 'good sense' and the woman with many children and few support services channels her anger into envy of the 'child-free'. But will an individual solution, whereby each of us resolves to change the way in which we love and bring up any sons or daughters *we* might have, really work?

"The personal is political" was the rallying cry of consciousness raising groups in the women's movement and these often came to grief for lack of a collective strategy when consciousness had been raised. For all its insights, Rich's work is similarly unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, it is one of the most readable, moving books to have come out of the women's presses of late.

Jubilee

Reviewed by Nigel Young

"Politics has had it ... Marxism, capitalism and socialism are all part of the great ant heap, building the same materialist, commercial culture", says Derek Jarman in *Gay News* 137. However the nihilism of his film, *Jubilee*, is no less rooted in a political attitude, and in some ways a very nostalgic and reactionary attitude too.

None of us would argue that we live in a perfect society, but it is senseless to dismiss the gains achieved through political struggle over the last century, whatever the problems are in 1978. In *Jubilee* these gains are dismissed. Society is represented as plastic and meaningless. Queen Elizabeth I is reincarnated and surveys, horror struck, the decadence and destruction of that society. A group of punk terrorists become the symbol for the final protest against the horrific progress of the twentieth century. It is an amusing if unintended paradox because today's political "ant heap" does allow the politics of protest—Queen Elizabeth's non-conformists got their heads chopped off or were burnt at the stake.

The punks in Jarman's film confront us with gory images, shocking images, decadent images, but are they more than the reflections of the eccentricities of Jarman's mind? Do they tell us anything about the nature of punk, women, gays, and finally the complex relation between sex, power and violence?

Punk may be a rebellion and a protest against social and political conventions; it may be about anti-regulation, anti-planning, anti today's realities and tomorrow's dreams. "Don't dream it, be it" says one of the characters in the film. Punk seems to have no structures, no institutions. No individuals have power in the punk world. Jarman's punks, though, are given power as a roving band of individualised terrorists and they are destroyed by other individuals (the police) who have more power. In *Jubilee* he has reconstructed punk so that it becomes the preserve of an elite group of terrorists. We are therefore forced to dream what we cannot be. In this sense Jarman's film is a cabaret of elitist political individualism and self destruction. It makes punk the preserve of minor superstars, the antithesis of punk's avowed aims.

The central role of women in *Jubilee* is totally undermined by the way Jarman presents them as caricatures of liberated women. They are physically, sexually and aesthetically aggressive. The pinnacle of their achievement becomes the ability to sexually objectify, torture and destroy as well as any man. These are depressing images which reinforce the power of masculinity, rather than the power of women. Jarman offers no anti-masculine perspective for women to control their own lives and therefore their experience of rebellion is dominated by male forces.

Just as the images of women are constructed within a conventional framework so are the images of gay men. Lesbians play their usual non-existent role in this film. Two punk brothers love each other gently between the sheets. But apart from being nice to each other, which is a rarity for gays in films, they are unexamined as personalities. Their relationship to the women is unexplored, and their own convictions unstated. Two sensuous men, but in the end about as accessible as a super stud in *Play Girl*. And to cap it all, like all nice gay guys, they get murdered.

As far as the relationship between sex power and violence is concerned, Jarman overindulges in the use of sadistic images and in so doing he dulls rather than disturbs, shocks rather than analyses. For instance, a pyromaniac sets fire to a baby in a pram, another punk woman kills her lover after he is fucked by her, there is a ritualised, half crazed, violent assault on a transvestite cafe assistant, we watch the cutting to pieces, with broken glass, of a pretty punk boy by police riding motor bikes and wearing leather boots and walking like fascists—hardly original, the gunning down of the gay brothers by the same policemen and the revenge killing by the women of the policemen; one is disembowelled and dies with an erection, the other is blown up by a molotov cocktail.



Beyond making me feel queezy these events seem a crude analysis of the ways in which sexual oppression is distorted in modern society. In the last fifty years we have already had extensive writings (Marcuse and Reich) on the ways our sexual energy has been channelled and controlled and the effects this can have. But whereas past writers on this subject have suggested creative uses of the release of that energy, Jarman offers us none. Will it help us to lead fuller lives, make us happier, achieve personal liberation or freedom from economic exploitation? For Jarman the answer is obviously no. He calls those struggles "the ant-heap of politics ... building a materialist culture".

In the end *Jubilee* pretends to be a banquet but when the curtains close you feel you've only been given the crumbs—a freaks' show.

Switchboard

LONDON GAY SWITCHBOARD

London Gay Switchboard, open 24 hours a day, took over 117,000 calls in 1977, and it is already clear that the total for 1978 will exceed this—many of the calls being from people who have had no previous contact with the gay community. New volunteers are regularly needed to help cope with the ever-increasing volume of calls—although we have three phones, we cannot always muster two, let alone three volunteers to cover every shift, with the result that we often get complaints from callers that our number is continually engaged, and urgent calls (e.g. from people who have just been busted) may get delayed.

Volunteers need to be able to deal swiftly and accurately with straightforward information calls, as well as coping with a wide range of counselling calls, and are also expected to help with the mountain of 'administrative' work behind the scenes which keeps the service going.

Prospective volunteers should initially phone London Gay Switchboard (01 837 7324) and leave their phone number and address, and they will be contacted in due course and invited to an interview.

Kollontai

Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings. Translated with an introduction and commentaries by Alix Holt.* Allison & Busby 1978 £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Jeffrey Weeks

For the post-revolutionary generation of the 1920s Alexandra Kollontai was the epitome of the new communist woman. For radicals in the West she was the embodiment of the will to transform sexual relations in the new Russia; she was an Honorary President of the British Sexological Society, a sponsor of the World League for Sexual Reform. For the revolutionary she was the prophet of sexual anarchy, "free love", sex as a glass of water. And for the gathering conservatism in the Soviet Union from the mid 1920s she was the butt of sharp polemic and moral censure. She lived all the major crises in the international workers' movement from the early part of the century from the first movement of revolutionary hope in 1905 to the retreat into single party dictatorship and the stifling of inner party democracy; the decline into bureaucratic conservatism and then Stalinism; and the painful, effective exile of public honour and political silence that marked the last thirty years of her life. And running through is her commitment to women's emancipation and sexual reform—a major guideline of her communist politics up to the 1920s and a subterranean memory in her work thereafter as a servant of Stalinist Russia in various honorific diplomatic posts abroad.

It was inevitable that when the women's and sexual liberation movements revived in the late 1960s and a connection with socialist politics was sought, it was to Kollontai that we looked (the London Gay Marxist group, for example, studied such of Kollontai's pamphlets that were then available in England). Now for the first time, we have a representative selection of her work available in clear translation; certainly the most representative sample we are likely to see, this side of a new revolution in Russia. Alix Holt's translations and introduction are clear, readable and informative. My main criticism on the editorial side would be that each individual article or extract is not clearly dated and placed. The information is all there somewhere in the text, but it is tedious to have to search it out every time. Apart from this, we are usefully guided through the various phases of her work, from her early involvement in social democracy, through her exile, the revolution, her work as Commissar for social welfare, her participation in the workers' opposition, her advocacy of a Communist Morality, to her diplomatic work.

The political point that seems to me to come out of the *Selected Writings* is that Kollontai's political work and writings, though inspiring, cannot be unproblematically assimilated to our own. There are no theoretical insights that we have lost, or formulae that we could easily employ today. What we have are the examples of her endeavours to integrate the struggle of women with the struggle for socialism; and the negative example, of the lessons of her relative failure. Holt captures the essence of this latter point when she notes that Kollontai's career "fits the broad pattern of women taking a back seat and not aspiring to the realms of theory or leadership". Someone like Rosa Luxemburg is the exception that triply undermines the rules, for she had almost nothing to say on women. This focuses attention properly on the failure of the Bolsheviks to fully integrate a feminist theory and practice into their work. The Russian movement always had a formal adherence to fighting on women's questions, but, given the way it defined the tasks before it, there was a persistent reluctance to devote energies to it. And behind this was a formal rejection of "feminism" as such, which was invariably identified with "bourgeois feminism", the pursuit of mild reformist changes, such as the vote, in a society where this would affect only a tiny number of women. It was this rejection of "feminism" and therefore of the necessity for a strong militant, socialist inclined but *autonomous* women's movement, able to press its demands on the party and work for change within the new state, that was one of

the roots of the ultimate failure of the "sexual revolution" in Russia. For without it Kollontai had no base in Soviet Russia to fight for a stronger commitment to radical change in relations between the sexes. Alix Holt seems to suggest at one point that this lack of commitment was the result of the political and theoretical weakness of Kollontai. But this in turn is a product of her isolation and her adherence to a party ideology which believed that all struggles would be equally achieved through the party agency. There were strong objective reasons for the absence of a mass autonomous women's movement, but after 1917 it was also a political choice. As a result there was a strong ambivalence in Kollontai's writings. On the one hand she stressed that "the followers of historical materialism reject the existence of a special woman question separate from the general social question of our day". On the other side she recognised the specificities of women's oppression: "woman is oppressed not only as a person but as a wife and mother." It was her historically and politically structured inability to theorise the links between the specific oppressions (of Patriarchy) and the "general social question" that lay at the heart of her political failure. What Holt calls her "passive resistance", her silent acquiescence to Stalinism, becomes an apt commentary on this failure. So we note her theoretical reliance on the work of writers like Havelock Ellis and German writers on sex, all still within a liberal problematic; her inability to completely transcend the traditional sex roles, especially on child care; her retention of a conception of a "maternal instinct". We observe her vital recognition that child bearing must be conceived as a social concern not a private matter for the mother alone. But there is also the half thought out willingness to subordinate reproduction to the needs of society, which already prepares the way in the 1920s for the retreats on abortion, divorce, the family, homosexuality, in the 1930s and 40s.

But what strikes the reader most movingly today is not so much the inadequacies as the courage of the effort to confront what she called "an awful sexual crisis." Immediately after the revolution Kollontai was in tune with the Communist Party in confronting the issues on sex, the family, gender relations, morality. The Party gave it, perhaps under the impact of civil war and imperialist intervention, a fairly low priority; but there was an open debate, in which Kollontai played a leading role. By 1923 or so, however, she was already on the defensive; a new conservatism was already concerned with the breakdown of the family, and the need for a stricter morality, subordinated to the needs of production. By the 1930s the battle was lost. Her last intervention in political debate was a paper on "Marriage and Everyday Life" in 1926. In the discussion her own isolation was the index of her now total political ineffectuality. The crisis in the Soviet economy and state meant that sexual reform was buried beneath a mound of other concerns. Thereafter Kollontai confined her views to her private (and still unpublished) diaries.

LESBIAN LEFT

Lesbian Left hold an open meeting once a fortnight when we talk about topics relevant to both the Women's Liberation Movement and to Socialism. Some of these have included pornography, the Socialist Feminist Conference in Manchester at the end of January, rape and violence against women, the possible formulation of a seventh demand of the W.L.M. on the latter at the National Conference after Easter, the A.I.D. for lesbians issue, feminist avant-garde film and sexuality in China.

Also once a fortnight two smaller groups meet. One is producing an entertainment for the National Conference. The other is a history (herstory) study group which is discussing several topics including theories of sexuality, the lack of concurrence between the lesbian role in history and of gay men, the new role of women in the W.L.M., stereotypes of lesbians, and possible connections between popular images of gays and notions of decadence in art.

For further information about Lesbian Left meetings telephone 01-836 6081 (A Woman's Place. 42 Earlham St, London WC2.)

Jacky Plaster

Fighting Fascism

An Open Letter
by John Shiers

Dear Gay Left,

I was glad to see Bob Cant's article "Gays and Fascism" in the last issue. However it worries me that despite all the talk about the dangers of the rise of fascism and the need to oppose organisations such as the National Front, the Left has actually thought very little about how most effectively to build a mass based anti-fascist movement and what tactics are most appropriate to use in the current situation. If you are serious in wanting to prevent the National Front growing, so the argument runs, you have no alternative but to get out there on the streets and stop them marching. After all, Hitler himself said that the only thing which would have stopped the Nazis gaining power would have been to crush them early enough "with the utmost brutality". And we all know, don't we, what an authority on correct socialist strategy Hitler is!

The need to evaluate the current anti-fascist strategy

I believe that it is urgently necessary for socialist activists, both inside and outside left groups, to reconsider our whole approach to the question of how to curb the growth of fascism and the authoritarian right in general. Quite rightly we are revolted by fascist ideas, literally worried about our own lives in the advent of a fascist victory and determined that fascism will not triumph again. But a crude economic interpretation of the causes of the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, coupled with a grossly over-emphasised notion of the importance of Cable Street in 1936 in preventing the further growth of the British Union of Fascists and a determination to smash the faces of any N.F. member who dares to walk down the streets, does not constitute grounds on which to base a serious anti-fascist strategy.

Groups like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) seem to regard any disagreement with "the line" on physical confrontation with fascists as heresy: that socialists violently attack fascists is as much a matter of self-evident (and therefore undiscussed) principle as is worker control of industry. To doubt this raises questions about the depths of one's socialist commitment. There has been so far no National Conference of Anti-Fascist Activists to discuss the nature of fascism and the threat that it poses in Britain today. Neither has there been a democratic decision that tactics based on physical confrontation are the most appropriate ones. It is all assumed --and you either go on NF counter demonstrations "knowing" that "everyone accepts" a punch up with the NF (and with the police in order to get through to the NF) is the goal if there is enough of us--or you stay at home.

I feel both personally and politically concerned about accepting these terms. Personally because I want to go on anti-fascist marches as a socialist and not be committed to having to attack the police or the NF; politically because I believe these tactics are both wrong and counterproductive. I'll briefly explain why I feel this.

"Personal" hassles about violence

Firstly the "personal" bit which is also "political" because I don't think it is possible to divorce personal feelings from assessments of political strategy. The orthodox left has tried to do this by speaking in terms of there being an (objectively?) "correct analysis" of a situation which should guide our action. One of the things gay liberation has taught me is that when I think "politically", I am also expressing myself "personally"; left debate tries to exclude feelings from discussion but it is feelings that actually determine, at the end of the day, what I do. Whether I am a Leninist or a libertarian: whether I join SWP, International Marxist Group (IMG), the Communist Party (CP) or remain

"independent": whether I find the use of political violence exciting and purifying or whether I am sickened, revolted and scared of it. So before I go any further let me come clean. Physical violence absolutely terrifies me. I can just about cope with the *idea* of defending myself when attacked (but have miserably failed on the three occasions it has so far happened to me) but to actually *initiate* physical violence totally freaks me out. I cannot justify it or cope with it. My apparently "political" objections to current anti-fascist strategy are, of course, intimately shaped by this and some people may choose to read them as simply the reflections of a cowardly liberal. If they do, however, I am equally interested in what they feel about *initiating* violence. Does it suddenly become all right when it is a fascist who is being blinded by a piece of a broken bottle thrown on a demonstration? Is it exciting to fight when it can be defined as in the "objective interests" of the class struggle? Is it ever a sexual turn on to "smash the scum"?

Having got that out of the way onto the "meat" (what do feelings matter, after all, when there is a war on). Initiating violence against the NF raises questions of both principle and strategy. Principle in that it forces us to ask the question of the contexts in which the initiation of violence is a legitimate socialist tactic. Strategy in that it may well be that the consequences of its use are to contribute towards the growth of the authoritarian right, rather than to turn people off when they see that socialists are bigger, stronger, tougher and more "in control of the streets" than fascists are.

The principle of using offensive violence

On the matter of principle, surely in the light of past experience we, as socialists, must be very careful about initiating violence to achieve our ends. Violence spirals into more violence—where does it stop? If you start off with fists how long does it take before it becomes milk bottles and smoke bombs? (We've already got there now.) Then molotov cocktails and hand grenades, and when the police start using tear gas and water cannons to "disperse" demonstrators, when do the guns start coming out? If we fight on their terms then we soon become like them psychologically: we have to in order to survive. Machismo rules OK- -not OK for me anyway.

It is quite true that the State is built on institutionalised violence but can the planned use of street fights and riots transform that? Surely we have to examine clearly how in our specific historical context we can best advance socialist and feminist goals. Violence in self-defence when under attack is obviously both legitimate and necessary, and it is inevitable that violence will develop in societies where the freedom to organise politically is banned: there it is self-defence against the State's initiation of violence (which does not mean to say it should be romanticised or glorified). In Britain at present it is not illegal to organise ourselves as socialists and anti-fascists. Our weapons should not therefore be guns, smoke bombs or fists. They should be words and actions; utilising the opportunity we have to change consciousness and build a mass movement. If the NF, the police or anyone else attacks us in doing this, we have to defend ourselves, But defensive violence is a world apart from offensive violence. The use of offensive violence by the Left against the police and the NF just serves to reinforce the fears of large numbers of people that the Left is as brutal and authoritarian as the Right. It does nothing to encourage them to come out and join us. The Right will be defeated not when the Left "control the streets" but when the mass of people in society control the streets—and their own lives. There is no process in which a left vanguard can short-circuit this. The orthodox Left is masculine defined in both its theory and practice: even its metaphors of victory are related to offensive violence, which is about asserting and celebrating power over others; domination; making the enemy grovel.

That is why most Leninists will disagree with what I've just written; they have no analysis of the linkage between violence, power and the male role. All too often they portray women's liberation as women becoming liberated from "femininity" (thus behaving like "Men") rather than the ending of male power by the transformation of the male role and of "masculinity" as the governing principle on which society is based. A feminised socialism, which is presumably what gay socialists alongside the women's movement are out to achieve, surely needs to work out how to be militant and assertive without falling into the male trap of defining victory in terms of obliteration or domination of opponents. Because offensive violence and male power seem to be so interlinked, I cannot see how a feminist perspective can possibly justify the use of physical violence except when it is necessary for self-defence.

But, as Bob Cant rightly points out, the NF does use offensive violence. They beat up isolated gay people, black people and socialists. The point, however, is that this is part of their private not their public face. Publicly they present themselves as having total respect for "law and order", merely demanding the right to walk the streets freely—rights which they portray the Left as threatening. By attacking them at the point they are publicly seen to be being "peaceful", the Left is playing into their hands. They can pose as non-violent demonstrators; we as the violent attackers, the people to be frightened of. We must expose the hypocrisy of the NF in claiming to be a peaceful, law abiding political party and we must defend ourselves from attack. None of this, however, entails initiating violence towards them on demonstrations.



The question of an appropriate strategy

This last point leads on to strategy. It seems to me that we are falling right into the NF's hands by fighting them, or rather the police, in the streets. They are defining the terms for our protests. They want us to be seen to be the sources of disorder and chaos so that they can pose as the party which will restore law and order; stamp out (literally!) violence from the streets. Added to this, the police are also able to hide their true function by presenting themselves as neutral law enforcers, just "doing their job" of protecting the rights to demonstrate freely. Because they can always muster enough strength to "protect" the NF, we are seen to be attacking them directly. This further distances us from the mass of people in society who we want to be actively involved in the anti-fascist movement. An additional bonus for the police is that they learn new techniques in the con-

tainment of mass demonstrations.

I think it is true that in the short term threatening fascists with physical violence can make them frightened to go out on demonstrations (at the moment there's more of the Left than the Right on demonstrations. What about if the tables are ever turned?). It may also make some people more wary of voting for or joining the NF. But in the long term it is merely reinforcing the attitudes which lead people to be attracted to fascism because fear never changes minds. The authoritarian Right whether it is directly fascist or not, will gain ground if it is able to capture the feelings of large numbers of people whose lives have been made insecure by a severe, long term crisis in capitalism and the slow decay of the existing social order. It is a dangerous illusion to think that getting the State to ban NF marches is doing anything to curb the growth of racism, sexism or fascist solutions. It can make us complacent enough to devote more time to stopping fascist movements marching than in defeating fascist ideas. The NF may lose votes; may even be banned, but if this happens as a result of the fear of Left violence, fascism may well emerge stronger than ever in the end.

We have to get out of our heads the idea that there are "fascist solutions" to the defeat of fascism; that being tough, hard, brutal, unfeeling, "male" is the way forward. As gay people who have suffered so much from a male-defined world, we alongside the feminist movement, ought to be in the best position of any on the Left to realise this.

But are there any alternatives?

So what do we do? It sounds very weak but I'm sure, as I mentioned earlier, that we need to begin to talk about the whole issue of opposition to fascism. We need not just a conference about it, but some kind of machinery in which the anti-fascist movement can democratically decide its strategy on demonstrations. Where people in SWP can put their views and people like me can put mine, and where people who choose to march under an anti-fascist movement banner would respect the democratic decision on strategy made. The whole issue of what slogans to use and what demands to make (e.g. whether or not to demand that the State ban the NF) can be fully discussed there.

My own feeling is that we must work through whatever channels are open to us to expose the danger fascism and the authoritarian Right poses to almost all of us in this society. In terms of counter-demonstrations I think we should work on a "community base" model in which we seek to involve as many individuals and groups as possible in peaceful processions (i.e. processions where we do not seek to initiate violence on anyone) rather than simply trying to mobilise the few who are already committed Left wing or trade union activists for a physical confrontation. If the NF are holding a public meeting, a rally on common land or marching down a street, we should be demanding the withdrawal of that facility from them and encouraging trade unionists to strike against any body (public or private) which allows fascists access. Imagine the effects of a week long strike of all local government workers in an area where the local authority allowed a public hall to be used for an NF meeting; or a rent and rates strike by tenants and residents in an area where the NF has been allowed to march.

All this may sound a bit utopian—we don't have that kind of support. But surely if we really do believe we can defeat the Right, and are not just trying to live out romanticised versions of street battles of the past, we have to be getting exactly "that kind" of support. For it is going to be the actions of the mass of ordinary trade unionists and members of the community: women and men; adults and children; black and white; gay and straight; that will determine the direction our society will take in the future. To believe that "the Left" can, in itself, stem the growth of fascism and the authoritarian Right is a false road to take. The use of offensive violence against the NF is doing nothing to encourage the self-activity of the mass of people and their own, conscious, participation in curbing the fascist cancer. On the contrary, it only glorifies machismo.

With gay love and solidarity, John Shiers.

What's Left

GAY SOCIALIST CONFERENCE 78

A number of gay socialist groupings are organising a conference to take place in London in November. The planning group feels that current theories of sexual politics have reached an impasse and that the conference should therefore focus on developing a theory of sexuality, power and 'homosexuality', and the relations and differences between gay women and gay men in the gay movement.

Details from Gay Socialist Conference 78, c/o 38 Chalcot Road, London NW1. Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

READERS' MEETING

There will be a readers' meeting from 2.00 pm on Sunday 18th June at the Oval House, Kennington. (Next door to Oval tube station) We would like to concentrate on the questions raised by our collective article 'In the Balance'. Lunch is available there from 1.00.

EDITORIAL NOTES

This issue of *Gay Left* is by nature of a stock taking, attempting both to grasp the general situation facing gays during this peculiarly confusing period, and to explore individual experiences of eight years of gay liberation. In the next issue we hope to be able to take up again some of the major issues raised here, both explicitly and implicitly. To help us to do this, we would welcome contributions of any length or kind on these issues.

US Distribution: For the past two issues we have been distributed in the USA by Carrier Pigeon, 88 Fisher Ave. Boston, Mass., USA 02120. American readers who have difficulty in obtaining copies are urged to contact Carrier Pigeon, and to inform their local bookshops of Carrier Pigeon's existence.

New Address: Finally, please note our new address: 38 Chalcot Road, London NW1.

ANTI-RACIST, ANTI-FASCIST CONFERENCE

A national delegate conference is being organised by the Anti-Racist, Anti-Fascist Co-ordinating Committee to discuss future strategy. It will take place in London on June 3-4. Further details from the Conference Secretary, Box 53, 182 Upper Street, London N1.

CONTRIBUTIONS

We always welcome contributions on any topic and of any length. Articles, letters, reviews, cartoons etc. are all equally welcome, and they do not have to be long or 'heavy'.

For our next issue we are particularly looking for contributions in three areas—responses to the issues raised by the collective article on the current direction of the gay movement; contributions to our series 'Gays at Work'; and articles on any aspect of gay culture, a topic we hope to feature in *Gay Left* No. 7.

Subscriptions

Inland £1.50 for three issues, Overseas Airmail £3 or \$6 for three issues. Longer subscriptions at 50p per issue inland, £1 or \$2 overseas airmail. Subscriptions may start with *Gay Left* numbers 3 or 4. Donations always gratefully received.

Make all cheques (Sterling or US or Canadian Dollars only) payable to Gay Left, 38 Chalcot Road, London NW1

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THE COLLECTIVE

This issue was put together by Keith Birch, Derek Cohen, Emmanuel Cooper, Richard Dyer, Simon Watney, Jeffrey Weeks, Nigel Young.



BACK ISSUES

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Women in Gay Left, Gays and Class, IS Gay Group, Gay Workers' Movement and much more.

Gay Left No. 4

Love, Sex and Maleness, Communists Comment, Lesbians and the law, Darwinism and sexuality, reviews etc.

Gay Left No 5

Why Marxism, Images of Homosexuality in Film, Lesbian Invisibility, Gays & Fascism, Gay Theatre Past & Present, Politics & Ideology, Gay History, Future of the Gay Movement.

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